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FAME AND FORTUNE WEEKLY.

STORIES OF BOYS WHO MAKE MONEY.

THE ROAD TO SUCCESS; OR, THE CAREER OF A FORTUNATE BOY. *By A SELF-MADE MAN.*



Just as Joe raised the lid of the box, there sounded a quick footfall behind the boys. Glancing up, they saw the mysterious Frenchman with a heavy cane in his hand. Pointing at the box, he exclaimed, harshly: "That ee's mine!"

Fame and Fortune Weekly

STORIES OF BOYS WHO MAKE MONEY

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The Road to Success

OR,

THE CAREER OF A FORTUNATE BOY

By A SELF-MADE MAN

CHAPTER I.

THE MYSTERIOUS FRENCHMAN.

"Look yonder, Sam," cried Joe Page, suddenly clutching his companion by the arm and pointing at the wreck of an old stone house which loomed up grim and ghostly in the pale moonlight in the adjoining field; "there it is again—the same light I saw moving around there last night from the window of my room when I was going to bed."

"I see it," replied his friend, Sam Parsons. "There's somebody nosing around that old building with a lantern. Do you think it can be John, your hired man, looking for something he's lost?"

"No," answered Joe, in a decided tone, "it isn't John, for I spoke to him this morning about the light I saw there last night, and asked him if it was he that was poking around the old ruin, and he said no."

"Then who can it be? No stranger has any right on your property. Then, what object could any stranger have in prying around an old, dilapidated building like that, especially at this hour of the night?"

"Ask me something easier, Sam. Let's go over and see who it is, anyway."

"I'm with you. We'd better carry a club apiece to protect ourselves in case the stranger should turn out to be some pugnacious tramp inclined to resent our interference."

The two boys were leaning over the side veranda rail of

the Page farmhouse, which stood back some distance from the country road.

Both were uncommonly bright-looking boys, about sixteen years of age, without a speck of hayseed in their make-up, although they had been raised on Ulster County farms.

The Page farm was situated about a mile from Pembroke village.

It comprised about ninety acres, of which sixty were suitable for tillage, the remainder being about equally divided between woodland and pasture.

Joe, with the assistance of a hired man named John Jones, ran the farm for his mother, who was a widow.

He had three sisters—nice, industrious girls—who were a great help about the place, especially in the summer, when Mrs. Page took a few boarders from New York City. Sam Parsons, Joe's particular crony, lived half a mile further out along the road.

He had a father, mother and one sister, and his folks also took in boarders during the summer season.

The Page property had once upon a time been two separate farms, divided by a rail fence.

Farmer Page, a year before his death, bought the adjoining farm, on which stood an old stone house, a relic of Revolutionary days, for fifty dollars an acre, or seventeen hundred and fifty dollars for the thirty-five acres, paying five hundred and fifty dollars cash and giving a flat mortgage on the combined property for twelve hundred dollars to Squire Dalton, the village lawyer.

The stone house in question, which stood near the divid-

ing fence, was little better than an antique ruin, and within the last week or two Joe and John Jones had been pulling a portion of it down.

They wanted the stone to build a substantial wall along the road in front of the farmhouse in place of the dilapidated, worm-eaten fence that had stood there for an indefinite number of years, and which, in Joe's opinion, at least, was a disgrace to the property.

On the previous evening Joe had seen a light moving about in the old stone house, and he supposed at the time that John Jones was out there for some purpose.

John, on being questioned in the morning, denied that he had been there at the hour mentioned, and so the boy wondered who the night visitor was.

The matter slipped from his mind until Sam and he were sitting together at the end of the front veranda that evening, soon after dark, when he told his friend about the circumstance.

He had scarcely finished his story when his sharp eye discovered the same light again, moving around the partially dismantled floor of the ancient edifice, and he called his companion's attention to it with the words that open this story.

Having decided to investigate the matter, the two boys went to the barn, got a stout cudgel each, and started for the stone house.

They approached the building with due caution, though they failed to see the light any more, and finally reached a window, bereft of sash, on the ground floor.

Looking through this, they beheld a man of average height kneeling in one corner of the room, busily engaged with a trowel in detaching one of the flagstones that formed the floor.

The lantern stood between him and the wall, and consequently his body cut off the reflection of the light.

The intruder wore a wide-brimmed felt hat, had a short cape over his shoulders, and his frock coat was buttoned close about him.

"What the dickens is he up to?" whispered Joe to his companion.

"Trying to lift one of those stones out of the floor, I guess," responded Sam.

"What does he want to do that for?"

"Search me," replied his friend.

"Mighty funny piece of business, don't you think?"

"Rather. He must be hunting for something."

"Why, what could he be hunting for in this old house?"

"You've got me. Hadn't we better ask him?"

"I don't like his appearance any more than I do his actions," said Joe.

Just then the intruder dropped his trowel and straightened up to wipe his face with his handkerchief, when the boys caught a fair view of his countenance.

It wasn't particularly reassuring.

His features were dark and saturnine, their expression rather fierce.

He had a long stiff mustache and an imperial.

"He looks like a Frenchman," said Sam, under his breath.

"He does, for fair, and a most mysterious-looking one, at that," replied Joe. "I'd give something to know what his game is."

"It's up to you to ask him why he's trespassing on your property."

"He might have a revolver, and he looks ugly enough to shoot without much provocation."

"Are you going to let him pull the building down?" grinned Sam.

"If that was all he was up to, I shouldn't stop him. It would save John and me the trouble of doing it ourselves. We'll just watch him and see what he is trying to accomplish."

The mysterious Frenchman continued to dig the crumbling cement from around the stone with the most industrious perseverance.

Whatever he was trying to get at, he was thoroughly in earnest about it.

He paused now and again for a rest, but on the whole he wasted very little time.

At last he loosened the stone to such an extent that with the aid of a small bar of steel he pried it up and lifted it out of its receptacle.

Then he bent eagerly down, and the boys heard him utter an imprecation in a foreign tongue.

When he straightened up again his face was full of wrath and disappointment.

He took a paper from his pocket and consulted it by the aid of the lantern light.

Apparently he was puzzled.

He rose to his feet, muttering incoherent expressions between his teeth.

"He looks as mad as a hornet," chuckled Sam, nudging his companion.

"You mean a whole nest of hornets," grinned Joe.

"He expected to find something under that stone, and it isn't there," said Sam.

"I don't see what he could expect to find," replied Joe, somewhat puzzled.

"That paper he's got in his hand looks like a clue."

The Frenchman crumpled up the paper and flung it on the floor in a rage.

Then he kicked at it with great fury.

The paper being light, flew up into the air; the man's foot followed it so high that he overbalanced himself and came down on the floor with a thud that sent his hat flying from his head.

"Sacre bleu!" he roared.

The effect was so comical that Sam uttered a loud guffaw and Joe snickered gleefully.

The Frenchman heard the laugh and turned a startled face toward the window, but Joe ducked his head and pulled his companion away just in time to escape observation.

"He heard you," whispered Joe. "Come hide behind that pile of stone."

They had hardly concealed themselves before the foreigner's face appeared at the window.

He looked all around, but saw nobody.

Presently he left the window, and in a few minutes the boys saw him leave the building, with the lantern, now out, in his hand, and take his way across the fields toward the road.

They waited till he was out of sight before leaving their hiding-place.

"Let's go inside and see what we can see," said Joe.

"All right," replied Sam, and inside the building they went.

Striking a match, they looked around and saw that a stone, at a certain distance from each of the four corners, had been removed from the flooring.

The earth beneath was pretty solid and had resisted the several attempts of the Frenchman to make much of an impression in it with his trowel.

"I guess that fellow was crazy," chuckled Joe. "The idea of digging up those two stones! What could he have been hunting for?"

"Hunting for gold, maybe," replied Sam, with a laugh. "Say, that was the funniest fall I ever saw a man get in my life. Wasn't he mad at that piece of paper?"

Sam roared again as he thought of the ludicrous picture the mysterious Frenchman had cut when his foot went above the level of his head.

"There's the piece of paper now," said Joe, walking over and picking it up. "I wonder what is on it?"

He smoothed it out, then lighted a match and proceeded to examine it, Sam, with some curiosity, looking over his shoulder.

There were several lines of writing on it, but the words were unintelligible to the boys.

"That must be French," remarked Sam.

"It certainly isn't English," answered Joe. "I'd like to know what it means."

"I don't see how you're going to find out."

"I know what I'll do. I'll take it down to that professor who's stopping at the inn in the village. Maybe he'll be able to translate it."

"That isn't a bad idea. I'm curious myself to learn what it means. It must amount to something, and have connection with this old building, judging from the Frenchman's actions."

"That's right. There's some mystery in this matter that I should like to unravel. No sane man would come digging and hunting around an old abandoned house like this one unless he had some definite object in view."

"Whatever the object was, the Frenchman seems to have failed in his quest. I don't suppose you'll see or hear from him again."

"Maybe not, but you can't tell," replied Joe, putting the paper in his pocket. "Let's get out of here."

They returned to the farmhouse, and soon afterward Sam Parsons started for his home.

CHAPTER II.

WHAT WAS WRITTEN ON THE PAPER.

Joe Page was more interested in that bit of paper thrown away by the mysterious Frenchman than he cared to let on to his friend Sam Parsons.

He believed there was something in it, even if it had fooled the foreigner.

As he couldn't translate it himself, he intended to get Professor Burgess, a learned gentleman who had come to the village for his health, to do it for him, provided, of course, that the Professor could read French.

So immediately after breakfast he started for the village.

Professor Burgess was on the point of setting out for a walk when Joe reached the inn.

He had a slight acquaintance with the Professor, having met him one day along the road, and got in conversation with him as they walked along together.

On the strength of this he took the liberty of addressing the learned gentleman, who shook hands with him and seemed quite pleased to see the lad again.

"Do you understand French, Professor Burgess?" asked Joe, coming to the point as soon as possible.

The Professor replied that he did.

"Then you would do me a great favor by translating a few lines in that language for me," said the boy, taking the paper discarded by the Frenchman out of his pocket and handing it to the gentleman. "I am very anxious to learn the meaning of that writing."

"I will turn it into English for you with pleasure," said Professor Burgess, after glancing over the paper. "Come into the writing-room."

Joe followed him into the inn.

The Professor seated himself at one of the tables, and, taking a sheet of note paper, wrote out the following words, which he handed to Joe:

"Old stone house, near road, about one mile west of Pembroke village, Ulster County, New York State, U. S. A."

"Ground floor, kitchen, northwest corner, third slab diagonally southwest."

Joe read the translation slowly, and was rather disappointed at the result.

"Is that the whole thing, sir?" he asked.

"Yes. That's all that's on the paper. Can you understand what it means now?"

"Not altogether, sir; but I may be able to get at the meaning after I study it a while. Seems like directions for discovering something, doesn't it, sir?"

"You might take it as such. In which case the object to be recovered seems to be under the third slab in a diagonal direction from the northwest corner of the kitchen on the ground floor of a certain stone house, near a road, one

mile west of this village. Do you know of such a house in this vicinity?"

"Yes, sir. The only stone house that I know of in this county is on our property, which is just about a mile west of the village."

"Indeed? It must be the one indicated in this paper, then. All you will have to do is to follow these directions, lift the slab in question, and see if there is anything under it. That ought to be easy for you."

"It would, sir, if the house wasn't a wreck, with nothing to show which room was the kitchen. I've already pulled one side of the building to pieces to get stone to build a wall along the front of a portion of our property."

"How did you come in possession of this paper, and why do you imagine that it has any special significance?"

Joe told him about the mysterious Frenchman's two visits to the ruins of the old stone house, and how the man's conduct had aroused his curiosity.

"If this paper means anything, the Frenchman must have been hunting in the wrong room," said Professor Burgess. "I presume you have no idea what he was looking for?"

"No, sir. Judging from his actions and persistency, I should think it was something important," replied the boy.

"How much of the building is still standing?"

"About two-thirds."

"Well, if you have the time, and think it worth your while, you might look the ground floor of the house over in connection with these directions and see what you can make of them. It is not improbable but you might come upon some hidden treasure-trove, as it were. Money as well as other valuables have occasionally been found hidden away in old dwellings. These directions seem to point at some such conclusion with reference to the ancient building on your mother's property. At any rate, I think it worth an effort on your part. You have nothing to lose but your time, and possibly something to gain, by looking into the matter. I advise you to do it. If you are fortunate in making a discovery, I should be glad to have you let me know about it, so that I may congratulate you."

"Thank you, sir. I will certainly do so, if I find anything; but I have not great hopes of any such luck."

"Then you will not be greatly disappointed if nothing comes of it," laughed the Professor. "That will be some satisfaction, at any rate."

"That's right, sir," replied Joe, as he raised his hat and walked away, while Professor Burgess started off in the opposite direction.

As Joe drew near home he took a short cut across an adjacent field.

Passing close to a clump of bushes, he suddenly tripped over what he at first imagined to be a log, but instead of a log it proved to be a leg.

Then, to the boy's consternation, the mysterious Frenchman sprang up with a fierce imprecation.

"Ah, cochon!" he exclaimed, shaking a big walking-stick menacingly. "You Americans are clumsy peegs!"

"I beg your pardon," apologized Joe, hastily. "I didn't see your leg. I hope I didn't hurt you, sir."

"Bah!" retorted the foreigner, turning his back on the boy and stalking off.

"He's a fierce rooster," muttered Joe, looking after him. "I wonder why he was lying around in these bushes? He must be half-cracked."

As the farmer lad turned to go on he noticed something glistening on the ground.

He reached down and picked it up.

It proved to be a sterling silver box, gold lined, partly filled with a fine brown powder which proved to be snuff.

On the cover was an engraved inscription in French, the only words of which Joe could understand were "Jules Glorieux" and "Bordeaux."

"This must be the property of that crazy Frenchman. Where has he gone to?"

The boy looked around the field, but he could see no sign of the foreigner.

"He disappeared mighty quick. He is a mysterious chap, if I ever heard of one."

After hesitating a moment or two, Joe finally walked on toward home, with the snuffbox in his hand.

He had hardly reached the fence facing the country road, across which was the gate leading to the Page farmhouse, when he heard hasty steps behind him.

He turned around and gave a gasp—the mysterious Frenchman was approaching him at a rapid gait, and with eyes that seemed to flash fire.

"C'est un brigand—ma chere tabatiere!" he roared, making a snatch at the snuffbox, which Joe held in his hand. "By gar! You are von t'ief!"

"What's the matter with you?" retorted the boy. "I found it on the ground."

"You found him, eh? It ees mine, comprenez vous? You hand him ovair."

"Sure thing. I guess it's yours, all right. Your name is Jules Glorieux?"

"Oui," and he snatched the box out of Joe's hand. "Aha! C'est inestimable. I could not part wis dis for nossing. Allez!" waving his arm to the boy, at the same time turning quickly around and returning in the direction he came.

Joe didn't understand what "allez" (go) meant, but, as the Frenchman glared at him when he said it, he judged that it was a kind of curt dismissal.

John Jones, who was working on the stone wall, told him that Sam Parsons had just gone up to the house to wait for him, and so Joe hurried on to meet his friend.

"Well," said Sam, "did you find out the meaning of that paper?"

"I've got a translation of it," his friend replied.

"Have you?" eagerly. "What does it say?"

"Read it for yourself," replied Joe, taking the English copy made by Professor Burgess from his pocket and handing it to Sam.

"Is that all it amounts to?" asked Sam, in a tone of disappointment.

"That's all."

"It wasn't worth the trouble of having it translated."

"How do you know it wasn't?"

"Well, I don't see anything in it."

"I don't say there's anything in it now, so far as the paper directions go, but I've an idea, just the same, that there is something of value buried somewhere under the foundation of that building. As soon as I get it all pulled down I'm going to plough up the ground and see what I can find."

"That's a good plan. Still, if we knew which room was originally used as the kitchen of the old house, we might make a search first."

"The room where the Frenchman dug up the slabs doesn't look as if it had ever been used as a kitchen, but, just the same, it is the only one that is paved with slabs. That's why he tackled it, I guess. By the way, what do you think? I came across that mysterious Frenchman a little while ago and had a run-in with him," said Joe, with a grin.

"You did? Where did you meet him?" asked Sam, with a look of interest.

"In that field down yonder."

"You don't say? What was he doing there?"

"He didn't seem to be doing anything but lying in the bushes. Taking a rest or a snooze, maybe. I fell over one of his legs, and the way he went at me in French was a caution," chuckled Joe. "He called me a clumsy peeg."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Sam. "What did you say to that?"

"I apologized for tripping over him. He said, 'Bah!' and skidooed."

"I wish I'd been there," snickered Sam.

"After he'd gone I found a silver snuffbox on the ground that he'd dropped. It had his name engraved on it, with the word 'Bordeaux' and something else in French that I couldn't read."

"Let me see it," said Sam, holding out his hand.

"Sorry, but he discovered his loss and chased after me. He called me a brigand and a thief and snatched the box out of my hand."

He did?"

Joe nodded.

"What is the chap's name, if you know it?"

"Jules Glorieux."

"That sounds Frenchy enough, at any rate. I s'pose he hails from Bordeaux."

"Very likely. He ought to go back and stay there."

"Looks as if he was still hanging around intending to revisit the old building to-night. Perhaps he means to do some more digging."

"I shouldn't be surprised. We must keep a watch on him and see what he accomplishes. Now, Sam, if you've nothing on hand this morning you might give me a lift moving some of that stone down to the road where John is building the wall. It will be a great help to me."

"All right, Joe. I'm willing to make myself useful."

The two boys then went to the barn to harness a horse to the drag.

CHAPTER III.

THE BRASS-BOUND BOX.

For the rest of the morning the boys worked like beavers loading stone taken from the demolished walls of the old house to the drag and hauling it down to the road where John was working on the new wall.

At noon Joe called a halt when one of his sisters rang a big bell at the kitchen door announcing that dinner was ready.

After the meal the boys returned to the work.

It was about four o'clock that they were clearing away the last of the debris from a corner of the dismantled part of the stone house, when Joe noticed a slab sunk a little way in the ground.

It had not formed part of the original flooring of the room, now almost completely demolished, but had evidently been under it.

Merely by accident had Joe observed it, for it was thickly coated with dirt and therefore resembled the hard ground all around it.

The boy looked at it with some curiosity, wondering what it was doing there.

Sam was just then returning with the drag, and Joe, picking up a crowbar and motioning to the other bar that lay on the ground, called his companion to help him dig the slab up.

They set to work at once to pry it out of the ground.

"Is this slab part of the old floor?" asked Sam.

"No," replied Joe. "It's 'way below the level of the old floor."

"Then why is it imbedded in the ground? Looks as if it had been there some time."

"I haven't any idea why it's there," replied Joe. "From the trouble we're having to loosen it, I should say it was put there to stay."

"Do you think there's anything under it?" asked Sam suddenly, pausing in his work and regarding his friend with a look of interest.

"Why, what should be under it?"

"It just struck me that this might be the slab the Frenchman was trying to find."

"By George! I plumb forgot all about that. Maybe it is," added Joe, in some excitement. "Let's get a hustle on and see if there is anything under it."

Sam needed no further encouragement, but sinking his crowbar under the edge of the slab began to bear down with all his might.

Joe jammed his bar alongside of Sam's and added his weight to try and overcome the resistance offered by the imbedded stone.

Slowly it began to yield to their united efforts and moved upward a fraction of an inch at a time.

"It's a mighty tough proposition, all right," said Sam, stopping to wipe his perspiring forehead.

"It is that. Just jab away some more of the dirt from that side while I do the same with this side. Maybe we'll be able to hoist it out then."

They dug the packed earth way until both side edges were exposed when they got busy once more with the crowbars.

The slab now moved with more freedom and the boys, dropping the bars grabbed hold of the edge and began to pull it backward.

"There's a hole under it, I can see that," said Sam.

"Yes, and there's something in the hole, too," cried Joe, when they had lifted it up at a right angle with the surface of the ground. "Now then, once more, all together!"

They exerted all their strength upon it when it suddenly gave way and over it went ker chunk, carrying both boys on their backs.

"Oh, Lor'! I hit my head on one of those stones," cried Sam, sitting up with a grimace and rubbing his skull with his hand.

Joe picked himself up without a word and crawled to the edge of the hole to look into it.

He uttered a loud shout.

"There's a brass-bound box down here, Sam. Get up quick and help me pull it out," he cried excitedly.

"A brass-bound box!" repeated Sam, staring at his companion.

Then he forgot all about his sore head and sprang to his feet, fully as excited as Joe Page.

"May I be jiggered if it isn't so," he said as soon as he gazed into the hole. "Looks as if it was a money box. I'll bet that's what the Frenchy was after."

"I'm sure it is. Well, this is where he gets left. At any rate it belongs to me as it was found on our farm."

"Jingo! I wish I was you," said Sam, enviously.

"Never mind, Sam, I sha'n't forget to do what's right if there's anything valuable in the box, for you're helping at the job."

"If that's full of money there must be a small fortune in it," said Sam.

"Perhaps we'd better not crow till we're out of the wood. It may be full of old papers and documents of no value, except to the man who hid them here."

"Oh, come now, don't say that, Joe. I've made up my mind it's money, and if it turns out to be nothing but papers I'll have a fit," said Sam.

"The quickest way to find out the truth is to get it up where we can break it open and have a look. Come now, lend a hand."

They bent down and each seized one of the heavy tarnished brass handles.

"Now, then, up with it," cried Joe.

The order was easier uttered than executed, for the box was decidedly heavy.

"That doesn't feel like papers, old man," said Sam. "It's full of gold, bet your life."

"How much will you bet on it?" laughed Joe.

"I'll bet a dollar to a doughnut," grinned Sam.

"Bet your small change first, Sam. You're getting too reckless."

"This is no fool of a job lifting this box out," said Sam, after they had tugged at it awhile, raising it a few inches only to let it drop back again.

"If it hasn't got gold in it it must have lead," replied Joe, as they paused to take a rest.

"Lead! What would it be filled with lead for?"

"I was only joking. Of course such a strong box as this wouldn't have lead in it. I'm inclined to think it may be filled with silver plate. Lots of people buried their plate while the Revolutionary War was in progress whenever the enemy was reported to be in the neighborhood."

"But they took good care to dig it up again when the danger was over."

"Sure they did; but this may be a case where the family was wiped out either by Indians or a band of villainous Tories."

"That's right. There were lots of Indians up this way during the Revolutionary times, and later," said Sam, who had heard something about the early history of the county.

"Well, Sam, it's getting late, and if we're going to get the box out of this hole before sundown we want to get a move on."

"Well, lift your end and I'll jab the crowbar under it."

This plan was executed, and the other crowbar inserted under the box also.

"Now we'll both get hold of the same handle and pull it up the inclined plane. Maybe we can get it out that way," said the resourceful Sam.

Sam's scheme was adopted with ultimate success, and the brass-bound box landed on the ground.

Joe first proposed to load the box on the drag and carry it over to the house just as it was, deferring the examination of its contents till he and Sam got it up to his room; but their eagerness to see what was in the box, and the fact that the heavy hasp holding the cover was loose decided Joe to break it open at once.

He grasped a crowbar and smashed the hasp off with a single blow, then he dropped on his knees beside it and proceeded to lift the cover while Sam, his tanned countenance flushed with excitement, leaned forward to get a closer look at the contents.

Just as Joe raised the lid of the box there sounded a quick footfall behind the boys.

Glancing up, they saw the mysterious Frenchman, with a heavy cane in his hand.

Pointing at the box, he said harshly:

"Dat ees mine!"

CHAPTER IV.

WHAT THE BOX CONTAINED.

The boys were rather staggered by the unwelcome and unexpected appearance of the Frenchman, and Joe let the cover of the box drop back again.

Both stared at the fierce-looking foreigner without saying a word.

"By gar! What are you doing wiz dat box?" he demanded. "Dat ees mine, comprenez vous? Eet ees what I have hunt for dese one, two, t'ree nights. Parbleu, I take him wiz me dis minute."

"Hold on, monsoo," spoke up Joe. "Don't be so sure about it. This property belongs to my mother, and consequently everything on it and in it is ours. You haven't the faintest claim to this box."

"Aha! Vat ees dat? Your muzair she own dees box?"

"That's what she does," replied Joe.

"By gar! You are fonee boy," answered the mysterious Frenchman, in a sarcastic tone. "She has nossing to do wiz dees box. Eet ees mine. I come all ze way from la belle France to get eet. I had ze papier dat point out ze way."

"Perhaps you can tell us what's in the box, you seem to know so much," said Joe, with a grin.

"Dat ees my beesness," replied the Frenchman, impatiently.

"Well, it's our business, too, monsoo."

"Non—non! Allez! Allez!" cried the excited foreigner.

"What the dickens do you mean by Allay?" said Joe.

"Go! Comprenez?"

"I comprennay, but I'm not going just the same. When you say this box is yours you are talking through your hat."

Clearly the Frenchman did not understand what Joe said, but one thing was certain he was growing more angry every moment.

He was bent on getting possession of the box, while the boys were just as obstinate in their refusal to let him have it.

In fact, the idea of resigning the box was the last thing in their thoughts.

"Sacre!" cried Jules Glorieux. "You play wiz me. I feex you."

He put his hand in his pocket and drew a revolver.

"Now we see whezair you give ze box or not."

Sam had been standing aside leaning on his crowbar, an interested observer of the breezy proceedings.

If Joe gave the word he was prepared to jump in and help hustle the Frenchman off the lot.

When he saw the mysterious foreigner draw his gun, he gave a gasp of fear, then on the spur of the moment he lifted the crowbar and struck the man a blow on the arm, causing him to utter a roar of pain and to drop the weapon, which Sam quickly took possession of.

Monsieur Glorieux immediately turned upon Parsons and lifted the cane he had in his left hand to strike the boy, but Sam jumped back and pointed the revolver at him.

That stopped the infuriated Frenchman at once, and he stood glaring at Sam.

At that exciting moment John, the hired man, appeared unexpectedly on the scene.

"Hello," he said, with a look of bewilderment on his face, "what's the trouble here?"

"Sam and I just found this brass-bound box in a hole

in these ruins and that Frenchman stepped up and claimed it. Why it's been buried here a hundred years I guess, so what right has he to it?"

"Nevair mind," put in Jules Glorieux at this point, perceiving that he was at a great disadvantage. "Eet ees ze long lane dat ees not turned. Comprenez vous? I see you some ozzaire time."

With those words he walked away.

They watched him climb the fence and take his way down the road, and then Sam said:

"You came just in time, John, to make the odds too great for the Frenchy."

"Where did you find the box, Joe?" asked the hired man.

"In that hole underneath yonder slab. Sam and I had a deuce of a time getting it out. I had hardly broken the lock before that foreigner appeared and had the nerve to say the box was his."

"What's in the box?"

"We haven't had a chance to see yet. I'll open it now."

Joe threw up the cover of the brass-bound chest and disclosed a score or more of fat bellied bags, each tied at the mouth with a bit of cord.

"Gee whiz!" exclaimed Sam, with bulging eyes. "Bags of money or I'm a liar. Jumping grasshoppers! What a find!"

John Jones gazed dumfounded at the unusual sight, while Joe, although he had expected a revelation of some kind, either in plate or money, was too surprised to speak for a moment or two.

Sam dived his hand in and lifted out one of the bags.

The impression of the coin upon the surface of the bag could plainly be seen and left no room for the least doubt as to the character of its contents.

The only question was whether it was gold or silver.

Sam, anxious to solve this query, loosened the throat of the bag he held, and a stream of old gold coin, all English sovereigns, rolled out on the palm of his hand.

"Jimany!" he cried, "I never saw so much gold in all my life before."

As a matter of fact Sam hadn't seen a dozen gold pieces all told since he knew what money was.

"Put it back, Sam," said Joe, "and we'll carry the box to the house. Then we will count it and see how much the treasure amounts to."

Sam returned the coins to the bag and tied it up again reluctantly.

It was sad to reflect that none of this money was his.

He had never wished for money so bad in all his life before.

John helped the boys put the box on the drag, and then the party took up their line of march for the farmhouse.

When they reached their destination the treasure box was lifted on to the veranda and then dragged into the hall.

"Tell mother and the girls to come here," said Joe to the hired man, and presently Mrs. Page, followed by Mildred, Fanny and Winnie, her daughters, came trooping out to the front door to see what was in the wind.

"See what Sam and I found in the foundation of the old stone house yonder," said Joe, pointing at the box.

"Oh, my," exclaimed Mildred, "what a funny looking box. What's in it?"

"Guess," said her brother.

"Books?"

"No. What do you think is in it, Fanny?"

"Old clothes."

"You're away off. Now it's your turn, Winnie."

"Maybe it's full of money," laughed the youngest sister, though she didn't really believe it was.

"That's a good guess, Winnie," chuckled Joe. "How did you know?"

"What is in it, Joe?" asked Winnie.

"Why you guessed it—money, and chock full, too."

"Nonsense!" put in Mildred. "Do tell us what's in it if you know. Can't you see that our curiosity is aroused?"

"Then you don't believe it's full of bags of money?"

"Of course I don't. That would be too absurd."

"All right. Now I'm going to open it and show you how close Winnie came to the truth. Are you all looking?"

"Yes, yes, yes," cried the girls together.

"There you are," and Joe flung the cover back.

"Oh-o-o!" screamed the girls, in great astonishment when they saw the bags.

That those bags were full of real money seemed too good to be true, and Mildred had her suspicions that Joe and Sam were playing a joke on them.

"I don't believe that's money at all," she said, tossing her head. "You boys have made those bags and filled them full of something or another just to try and fool us."

Fanny, however, made a grab for one of the bags to test its weight probably, when the string that secured its neck came untied and a stream of coin flowed out like a waterfall, and danced and jingled all over the floor.

The girls shrieked in real amazement now.

Joe and Sam hastened to recover the coins and return them to the bag.

"My gracious! It is money—real new gold," cried Mildred. "Why Joe Page, did you really find that in the old stone house?"

"That's exactly what Sam and I did. We dug it up from under a big slab of stone, where it must have lain for the dickens knows how long—maybe a hundred years."

"There must be thousands of dollars in that box," exclaimed Fanny.

"If the contents of all the bags are gold, there's quite a fortune here. Let me see how many bags there are," said her brother. "Twenty," he said after counting them. "If there is \$5,000 in each bag that would make a hundred thousand."

A fresh chorus of astonishment arose at this rough calculation.

"You're not going to keep it yourself, are you?" said Mildred. "You're going to give it to mother."

"I think I will divide it up after Sam and I count it. Sam is entitled to a bag, at least, for helping me dig it up.

Then I might put a bag in the bank for each of you girls, which would make you heiresses in a small way."

"And how much are you going to give mother?" insisted Mildred.

"As much as she wants. We'll be able to pay off that mortgage now, and get new carpets, and furniture, and we won't need to take any boarders this summer."

"Won't that be a blessing," exclaimed Fanny.

"Come, Sam, help me upstairs with the box," said Joe. "I'm anxious to count this treasure and find out what it foots up."

The girls were quite crazy with delight as they followed their mother back to the kitchen where preparations for supper were going on, and they couldn't talk of anything but the nice things they expected to have now, the new clothes they were going to buy, and the splurge they intended to cut in the village.

As for Joe and Sam, as soon as they got the box up in Joe's room they barricaded the door against visitors and sat down to count the money.

It was all in English sovereigns of a date previous to 1780, and they looked as if they had come fresh from a mint.

Each bag contained exactly £1,000, or about \$4,840, which being multiplied by twenty, the number of bags, made a grand total of \$96,800.

"You could buy the whole village up with that," said Sam. "You folks will be the great moguls around here after this. Squire Dalton will have to take a back seat. I shall be glad to see him taken down a peg or two. He and his son put on altogether too many frills to suit me."

"Well, Sam," said Joe, "just help yourself to one of these bags. You've earned it, and \$5,000 will be quite a little stake for you."

"Do you mean that, Joe?" asked his friend, almost paralyzed at the idea of possessing such a large sum of money which he could call all his own.

"Sure I do. Take your choice, though they're all alike as far as their value goes."

"But it's all English money. What shall I do with it, the bank won't accept it."

"Take it down to New York and have it changed into U. S. notes at the current exchange rates. That's what I'm going to do with these nineteen bags."

"I'll go with you," said Sam, and it was so arranged between them.

CHAPTER V.

THE DREAM THAT WAS NOT ALL A DREAM.

"Ninety-two thousand dollars!" exclaimed Mrs. Page that evening at the supper table, when Joe told in round numbers the result of the count, while his three sisters held their breath at the magnitude of the amount.

"Yes, mother, or to be more exact, \$91,960, at the current rates of exchange," replied the boy, with a happy grin.

"It's a lot of money, isn't it?"

"It is too much money to have in a lone farmhouse even

for a single night," answered his mother. "I sha'n't sleep a wink all night."

"Neither will I," cried Mildred, with an anxious look.

"Nor I," exclaimed Fanny and Winifred with one breath.

"Oh, nonsense!" laughed Joe. "Who will know that we've got it?"

He had prudently refrained from mentioning the adventure with the mysterious Frenchman, as he knew the recital would only serve to make his mother and sisters extremely nervous.

"Sam Parsons will be sure to tell his folks, and then the news will get all about the neighborhood," said Mildred.

"No he won't. I cautioned him against it, and he promised to be as mute as a mopstick."

"But his father and mother will want to know where he got the bag of sovereigns you gave him for helping you get the box out of the hole and up to the house."

"He isn't going to show it to them, at least not until we are ready to take the gold to New York to exchange it for bank notes."

"When are you going to do that?" asked Mildred, earnestly.

"Tomorrow forenoon."

"You must take John with you as a guard," said his mother.

"I should think you'd have a great deal of difficulty in making the exchange of such a big sum of English money," said Mildred.

"I may and I may not. I'm going to take the gold to a safe deposit company first for safekeeping, and consult with the president of that institution as to the best way to exchange it for bills."

"That's an excellent idea, Joe," said his mother. "I was going to suggest something of that kind. It seems to me the only proper and business-like way to conduct the matter."

"That's right, mother. I have an idea that the safe deposit people will attend to the whole thing for me for a commission."

"How are you going to carry the money to New York?" asked Fanny. "In that box?"

"Oh, no, Fan; that would look too conspicuous. I mean to box it up in those four small starch boxes we have in the cellar. It will look like ordinary merchandise then."

"Are they strong enough? It would be dreadful if they broke open in the handling."

"I'll prevent that by nailing several iron bands around each of them. They keep that stuff on a roll at the big store in the village, and you can buy it by the yard. You've seen it nailed around the edge of cases, haven't you?"

"I think I have," answered Fanny. "I hope you'll put plenty of it about them, for you can't be too careful with that money."

"Leave that to me, Fanny. I'm not taking any more chances than I can help."

After supper Joe started for the village general store

to purchase a liberal supply of the thin iron box binding, and while he was away John Jones was stationed in the boy's room to stand guard over the treasure chest, with the Frenchman's revolver within easy reach.

As soon as Joe returned home the four starch boxes were got out of the cellar, and as fast as the boy packed a box with bags of money, filled up the vacant places with excelsior packing, of which they had a quantity in the house, and nailed on the cover securley, John put six iron bands around it.

The boxes were as weighty as a person would care to lift, for three held each about \$24,000, while the fourth footed up something over \$19,000.

"I guess they'll hold, all right, John," said Joe, viewing the iron-bound boxes critically. "They're pretty heavy. Would you carry one of those to the village on your shoulder if I gave it to you?"

"I'll bet I would," replied the hired man emphatically.

"How many times would you have to stop and rest," grinned Joe.

"A hundred times, I guess."

"I'll bet it would take you all night to get there."

"Supposin' it did, it would pay, wouldn't it?"

The boxes were piled up in a corner of the room and some old clothes thrown over them, while the brass-bound chest was shoved under Joe's bed for the present.

The house was more carefully locked up that night than usual, while Joe put the Frenchman's revolver under his pillow.

While he didn't exactly expect any trouble, it was the part of prudence to be prepared for it if it came.

It was true that the mysterious foreigner had as good as handed him out a threat when he withdrew from the scene of action that afternoon, but Joe couldn't see how the Frenchman would be able to do anything towards getting possession of the treasure of the old stone house, as he seemed to be alone in the scheme.

"Why he couldn't carry a single box of that stuff any distance even if he got a chance at it, that is unless he had a horse and wagon, and everything his own way. His threats amount to nothing. He said he came from France to hunt for the box. That's a long distance for a sane man to come on a wild goose chase. He must have picked up his knowledge over there from some person acquainted with the facts of the case, who furnished him with the directions on that paper he had. The chest seems to have lain under that slab something like a hundred years. It's a wonder no previous attempt was made to bring it to light. That stone house was tenantless for years before my father bought the property. It was a fortunate deal for us. When Squire Dalton hears that we found nearly \$100,000 on the property that he sold my father for \$1,750, he'll feel like tearing his hair out by the roots. He won't get over his chagrin as long as he lives.

Joe chuckled as he pictured the effect of the news on the pompous lawyer who considered himself the whole thing, not only in the village but the county as well.

"It will be a huge take down for him," thought the boy as he put out his light and jumped into bed.

Then he began to think about next day's journey to the metropolis with his treasure boxes in company with Sam Parsons.

"After we get through with the business end of the trip Sam and I'll have the time of our lives for a few days before coming back home. We'll take in all the sights, go to the theater, and enjoy every five minutes to the utmost. I tell you money makes the mare go every time."

With these pleasant reflections on his mind Joe fell asleep.

Joe's slumbers were seldom intruded upon by dreams—he was too sound a sleeper, as a general thing, for that—but the present occasion was an exception.

His brain was excited by the golden experiences of the afternoon, and though it was many hours before certain odd fancies took shape and reproduced themselves upon his sleeping thoughts, the fact that they did so at last was no great wonder under the circumstances.

His first dream was a pleasant one, for in it he seemed to have evolved from a comparatively poor farm boy to a young Monte Cristo with money to burn, and he was burning it at a great rate, and with intense satisfaction, when the scene changed and he found himself walking along a dark and lonesome country road, which he seemed to recognize, with all his pockets stuffed to overflowing with gold coin that he had just found somewhere.

A sense of undefined terror now seemed to be upon him, for he felt sure that he was being followed by an enemy who intended to get the money away from him.

The journey seemed to be endless, and while he didn't see the man who was dogging his steps he was confident his pursuer knew where he was and was biding his time, the better to accomplish his dark design.

Finally he came to a wood that stretched away for miles and miles in either direction so that he could not avoid entering it in order to reach his destination.

As he progressed through this wood something whispered to him that his enemy was now closing in upon him—that their meeting could not long be postponed.

At this thought his terror grew upon him till he could hardly drag one foot after the other.

At length he reached a clearing and felt compelled to sit down here and rest.

Suddenly he was conscious that somebody was creeping upon him from behind.

Until this moment he had had but a vague idea of who his enemy really was.

Now, although something prevented him from turning his head, or making any effort to escape, he instinctively understood that the person who was stealthily advancing upon him was a mysterious looking Frenchman, who carried a heavy stick in one hand and a long, keen knife in the other.

Strive as he would he could not break the spell that held him powerless.

At last he could feel that the man was right behind him,

that he had dropped his stick and put the knife between his teeth so that he could have his hands free to seize him by the throat.

Now the man bent over him and glared into his eyes, with a look of such malignant satisfaction that the horror of it shot through his nerves and awoke him.

Yes, Joe was now wide awake, but the horror of his dream was reproduced in dread reality, for bending above him, with a sinister looking knife in his teeth, and his bent fingers raised as if in the act of pouncing on the heretofore sleeping boy, was Jules Glorieux, the mysterious Frenchman.

CHAPTER VI.

THE THEFT OF THE GOLD.

"Aha! You awake, eh?" hissed the Frenchman, seeing the boy's startled, wide-open eyes fixed upon his face. "You make one leetle sound by gar, you are a dead boy!"

He pressed one hand on Joe's windpipe and with the other removed the knife from his mouth and pressed its keen point against the tender skin of the lad's throat.

Joe was now conscious that Jules Glorieux was not the only intruder in the room.

There was another whose form was thrown into relief by the pale moonshine that came through the open window.

"Ecoutez!" exclaimed Glorieux fiercely. "Dat ees you listen to me. Ze boot ees on ze ozzair leg. Ze lane which I speak about has come to ze turn. I have you, mon pettit homme, where ze hair ees short. You move one leetle bit, poof! zis knife vill do ze beesness. I come for ze box dat ees mine. I get him dees time."

The Frenchman turned his head and said something in a peremptory tone to his companion.

The man advanced softly, at the same time taking a strong cord from his pocket.

With this he proceeded to bind Joe's arms to his side.

Then he tied a towel tightly around the boy's mouth.

"Now look for the box," said Glorieux to the man in French.

The pair hunted about the room.

They pulled the clothes from the four iron-bound starch boxes and Glorieux was about to lift one when his companion called him to the bed and pointed at the end of the treasure chest which lay underneath.

"It is heavy, Gaston," said Glorieux, in his native tongue. "We must use care in removing it."

They both got hold of the handle and pulled with all their strength.

As the entire contents of the chest had been removed, as the reader knows, the box naturally offered no resistance.

In fact it shot out so quick from under the bed that both Frenchmen lost their balance and tumbled over on the floor with a shock that could be felt through the frame house.

Jules Glorieux swore roundly as he picked himself up, while his companion, who had barked one shin, growled angrily in a subdued tone.

Joe, who had been lying in helpless silence since he was

gagged and bound, chuckled to himself, as he thought he saw the rascals' finish.

But he congratulated himself too soon.

Jules Glorieux was a man not easily turned from his purpose.

While he was afraid some of the inmates of the house had been aroused from their sleep by the noise, he was prepared to take the bull by the horns.

He knew that if his present enterprise failed the chance of his ever getting his hands on the treasure from the old stone house would be very small.

He had already informed himself that with the exception of the boy and the hired man, he had no one to fear but four females, and he did not anticipate that they would defeat his plan.

The two rascals stood as silent as statues waiting to see the outcome of their mishap.

Presently their alert ears caught the sound of some one ascending the stairs in slippers.

Glorieux said something to Gaston in a whisper and the fellow glided to the door, ran his hand over the wood and shot the bolt he found there.

Then came a knock on the door and the voice of Mrs. Page was heard outside.

"Joe—Joe," she said. "What is the matter?"

Glorieux tore the gag from Joe's mouth and placed the knife at his throat.

"Ansair. Say dat you had ze nightmare and take ze tumble out of ze bed."

There was a murderous look in the Frenchman's eyes that intimidated the boy, and so he did as he was told.

"Are you in bed now, Joe?" Mrs. Page asked as she tried the door and found it bolted, somewhat to her surprise, for her son was not in the habit of securing the door against intrusion. "Did you bolt the door?"

"Yes, mother, I am in bed and I bolted the door."

"Are you sure everything is all right, my son?" she asked anxiously.

"Yes, mother," answered Joe, with the glittering knife pricking the skin of his throat and threatening instant death if he hesitated or equivocated in his replies.

It was a trying situation for Joe, but he couldn't help himself.

Jules Glorieux evidently meant business, and the risk was too great for the lad to venture to thwart him.

In this manner the crisis was passed and the rascals averted discovery, for Mrs. Page turned away as if satisfied, and her steps were soon heard descending the stairs.

"It is well," said Glorieux to his companion, in French, "gag him again."

The towel was replaced about Joe's mouth and the knife withdrawn from his throat.

"The money has been removed from this chest," continued the mysterious Frenchman, lifting one end of the box.

He hardly considered it necessary to lift the cover, but

he did so to fully convince himself that the chest was empty.

"Now where is the money? Ah, these boxes in the corner. This boy is a shrewd one. He has lost no time. He intends to ship the money to New York it is likely, and there change it into the script of the country. We will save him the trouble, Gaston," with a wicked grin.

His companion nodded intelligently.

"You are sure these boxes contain the money?" he said.

"Lift one of them, and its weight ought to satisfy you," replied Glorieux. "They were concealed under these old clothes. I will take the risk that these boxes hold the money. We must carry them away at once."

"It will be a job," answered his associate.

"It shall not be so difficult. You get out on the ladder, then I will hand you one of the boxes on your shoulder. You will carry it down to the wagon in the road. When you come back you will take a second the same way. There are but four of them, so we will make the last trip together. A few hours of fast driving will carry us to the river where our sloop is moored. Once we have the boxes board we will hoist the anchor and sail for the city, where we can ship them on the La Burgandie for Marseilles. She sails the day after to-morrow, so we have plenty time to secure a stateroom."

This conversation was carried on in a low tone and, of course, in French, so it was impossible for Joe to either hear or understand a word that passed between the rascals.

The plan as outlined by Glorieux was immediately put into effect, and poor Joe was in despair when he saw the iron-bound boxes of gold, on which he had built such glorious air castles, removed from the room one by one until the last one had vanished out of the window and the mysterious Frenchman approached the bed for the last time.

There was a look of triumphant satisfaction in his eyes as he gazed down on the helpless youth.

"In one leetle moment I will say to you adieux. It is necessaree that I feex you so dat you vill not fall out of ze bed and give ze new alarm. I vill tie your feet to ze post, den you vill be—what you call him?—ah, oui, all to ze bon, I mean ze good."

The Frenchman uttered a wicked chuckle, and then proceeded to tie Joe's ankles securely to the bed post.

"Now you are like ze cochon—ze peeg—when we take him to the market."

The rascal chuckled again.

"You have said adieu to ze monce I hope, for you will not see him again I assure you."

The mysterious Frenchman then made an elaborate and sarcastic bow to the unfortunate Joe, walked softly to the window and disappeared.

He did not take the trouble to close the window, or remove the ladder, but picking up the last box of English gold lifted it on his shoulder and started after his companion, who had already preceded him to the road.

Gaston was waiting for him.

He dumped the box into the wagon up against the other three, and mounting to the seat alongside his associate, the rascally pair whipped up the horse and drove off down the county road toward the Hudson River at a rapid pace.

CHAPTER VII.

IN WHICH THE MYSTERIOUS FRENCHMAN IS UP AGAINST IT HARD.

It was two o'clock in the morning and Sam Parsons was standing at the window of his room looking out into the bare and silent road which ran close by the house.

Sam had gone to bed as usual at nine o'clock, but somehow or another he couldn't get to sleep.

That bag of English sovereigns which he had received from his chum Joe Page, and stowed away for safekeeping in an inside niche of the wide open fireplace in his room, kept dancing through his head, setting the drowsy god, Morpheus, at defiance.

Sam had never owned five whole dollars in his life, and here he had suddenly become the possessor of the equivalent of \$4,840, every penny of which was honestly his own property.

Why he was now worth almost, if not quite as much, as his own father, which was truly an astonishing state of affairs for him.

What boy under the circumstances would not have felt as Sam did that night?

There was one drawback, however, to his happiness, and that was what course would his father take with reference to that bag of money as soon as he learned it was absolutely the property of his son?

Wouldn't his parent demand its custody, and then use half or more of it to put up a model farmhouse he had long had in mind, but the realization of which he had been obliged to defer for want of the necessary funds?

Sam was of the opinion that the chances were as 99 to 1 that his \$4,840 would go at once to his father's credit in the village bank, and that he wouldn't get a soumarkee to lay out on his own personal enjoyment.

So Sam made up his mind to say nothing to his folks at all about his windfall.

He had managed to secure permission to go to the metropolis next morning with his friend Joe Page, and this was an extraordinary concession on his father's part.

He had decided that after he got his money changed into bills he would open a savings bank account in Poughkeepsie across the river, with \$4,800, and hide the book and the remaining \$40 in the chimney.

He could have a swell time out of that \$40, which would last him some time, and he would always have the satisfaction of knowing there was more to be had where that came from.

All this planning and calculation helped to keep sleep from Sam's eyes, and when he had settled everything to his own satisfaction he found he couldn't go to sleep any way.

He turned and twisted in bed to no purpose, and when

he finally heard the clock down stairs strike two, he got up and looked out of the window.

He didn't do that because he expected to see anything.

There wasn't much to be seen even in the daytime from his window, while at that hour of the morning the road and the country side were absolutely dead.

It was therefore with considerable surprise that Sam heard the rapid sound of wheels mingled with the chug, chug of a horse's hoof on the still night air.

He wondered if it was the village doctor on an emergency errand.

The vehicle soon came into view in the distance and Sam saw that it was an ordinary road wagon, with two men on the seat.

They seemed to be in a hurry for the driver frequently applied the whip to the horse.

Before passing the Parsons' farmhouse the wagon had to cross a short bridge which spanned a narrow but rather deep creek.

Just as the vehicle struck the bridge, after rushing down an incline, the rear right hand wheel came off and the wagon dipped with a crash, as if heavily loaded at that end, and Sam heard a succession of heavy smashes, as of weighty articles striking the bridge, and then a similar number of splashes, as if the said articles had continued their flight into the water.

Sam could also hear loud exclamations from the men, and saw the driver pull in the horse.

Both men dismounted and walked rapidly back to the bridge, where they stood by the rail and looked over into the stream.

"Gee whiz!" exclaimed Sam. "Whatever they had in the wagon has been dumped into the water. They'll have a nice time recovering it, for the water is all of eight feet deep there. The stuff must be heavy from the noise it made on the bridge, so the chances are they'll not be able to get it out of the stream without ropes and a stout windlass. At any rate they're stuck for the balance of the night for fair."

Sam saw one of the men pick up the wheel which had caused all the trouble and roll it up to the wagon, then the pair held a consultation.

One of them, whose personal appearance interested Sam greatly, for he put him in mind of the mysterious Frenchman, gesticulated violently.

"We've got stout ropes and a winch in the barn," said Sam to himself. "I've a great mind to dress myself, go down and see if I can't arrange a deal with those chaps. I'd just as soon earn another dollar as not."

As the boy never felt more wideawake in his life he decided to carry out his idea.

He got into his clothes in short order, but instead of leaving the house by the front door and walking down the road, he left it by the kitchen door, and cut across a bit of pasture which would land him at the corner of the bridge.

The line of heavy bushes growing beside the road fence

prevented the men from observing his approach, and, of course, he couldn't see them any better.

The loud and excited voice of one of the individual, however, served to guide the boy right to the part of the fence outside of which they were standing.

Although Sam was not afraid to show himself, still he concluded to take a sight at them first.

Nothing like being on the safe side any way.

So Sam when he reached the bushes, pushed his head through with as much caution as if he expected to find an enemy on the other side of the fence.

The moment his eyes took in the man who was doing the talking he was glad he had not rushed things.

It was for a fact the mysterious Frenchman.

And his companion was another, although not at all mysterious looking.

Monsieur Jules Glorieux was jabbering away to beat the band, and gesticulating like a monkey on a hot stove.

Sam at once lost all desire of proffering the services of the rope and winch at the barn.

Had he been able to understand French he would have learned something that must have opened his eyes; but as any other language than English was as pure Greek to him, their conversation was quite lost upon him.

He wondered where the man of mystery had picked up his companion, and why they were driving up the road at race-horse speed at that hour in the morning.

He also wondered what was the character of the freight they had lost in the creek.

"It seems to be important whatever it is," he said to himself, "for Monsoo Glorieux, of Bordeaux, looks as if he wanted to tear his hair out by the roots."

In good truth the mysterious Frenchman was acting as if he was a candidate for a madhouse.

And with good reason, as the reader will guess, for the four iron-bound boxes of English sovereigns they had taken such risk and trouble to abstract from Joe Page's chamber, were now resting out of sight in the creek and Jules Glorieux could see no immediate chance of recovering them.

CHAPTER VIII.

SAM GETS JOE OUT OF A PICKLE.

The two Frenchmen went down to the water's edge and tried to make out where the boxes lay; but the water was too deep and dark, especially at that hour, for them to see anything in the depths of the creek.

It was clear to the watchful Sam that they were at their wits end.

Finally they gave the problem up and returned to the wagon, the rear axle of which they found to be fractured.

They put the wheel into the forward part of the vehicle, and mounting to the seat drove over slowly toward the village of Highland, four miles distant.

"They'll be back in a few hours, I dare say," said Sam to himself, as he watched them depart. "I'd give something to know what those boxes contain. They were heavy

all right. I wouldn't be surprised if they had stolen them from some place. That Jules Glorieux, of Bordeaux, seems a sort of suspicious character to me. At any rate he tried to do Joe out of that treasure chest yesterday afternoon. Had the nerve to draw a revolver on us. We could have him arrested and put in the lock-up for that. Well, I'm coming down here the first thing after I get up to see if I can get a glimpse of those boxes."

Thus speaking Sam started back for the house.

Suddenly he stopped short as if a startling idea had struck him.

"Good gracious!" he exclaimed. "I wonder if those rascals paid a visit to the Page house, and got away with Joe's money? He told me he was going to box it up in four small starch boxes so it could be the more easily handled for shipment to New York this forenoon. The wagon came up the road from the direction of Joe's place. They were driving at breakneck speed at a suspiciously early hour, and making for Highland. Gee whiz! It looks as if there was something wrong for a fact. I've a great mind to run over to the Page farm, wake Joe up and tell him what I've seen."

Sam stood a few moments in an undecided way.

There might be nothing in the idea after all, and Joe would give him the laugh for coming over at that hour in the morning.

Yet the circumstances were sufficiently suspicious to demand notice.

The mysterious Frenchman had clearly shown that his object in coming to that part of the county was to get possession of the treasure chest hidden in the foundation of the old stone house.

When he discovered that the boys had found the chest, and they had naturally refused to let him have it, he had doubtless spotted the place they had taken it to and then made his plans to steal it that morning.

That's the way Sam argued and, as the reader knows, he was right.

"He brought that other chap to help him do the business," mused Sam, more and more convinced that he was on the right track. "They found that the money had been removed from the chest and nailed up in the starch boxes, so they carried off the boxes. No doubt they worked the game slick enough to avoid discovery. Well, I'm going over to Joe's anyway. If the money is safe there'll be no harm done."

Having decided the matter, he pushed his way through the bushes, jumped the fence and started down the road toward the Page property.

He walked fast and fifteen minutes later he was marching up the path that led to the front door.

"Everything is quiet round here," mused Sam, beginning to think he was wrong in his surmises after all. "It seems to me if those chaps had been here they must have awoken somebody in the house. It's no fool job to carry off several heavy boxes without being detected in the act. I guess I've made a donkey of myself coming over here."

He stopped at the foot of the porch steps and scratched his head.

To pound on the door and arouse the Page family only to find out that nothing had happened would make him look foolish, and Sam dreaded holding himself up to ridicule.

"I won't knock," he decided. "I'll go around on the side and fire pebbles at Joe's window. It won't do any harm to wake him up. If he chooses to give me the merry ha, ha, why I guess I can stand it."

So he marched around to the ell, in the second story of which was Joe's room.

As he turned the corner the first thing he saw was the ladder standing under Joe's window, which was open to its widest extent.

"Hopping toads! That doesn't look right," he cried, coming to a pause and staring hard at the ladder and the open window. "Joe wouldn't do anything like that—a clear invitation to any tramp in the neighborhood to walk into the house—even if he didn't have a dollar in the house. He would certainly be crazy to stand a ladder under his window in this fashion with nearly \$100,000 in his room, or at least somewhere in the house. I am sure there has been something doing here all right, and I'm going to climb that ladder and wake Joe up."

Sam didn't lose a moment making his way up the rungs, and inside of a minute he had his head inside of the window.

"Joe, Joe," he cried, "wake up."

There was a movement on the bed, and Joe Page, bound and gagged as he was, sat up.

He could not get out of bed as his ankles were tied tight to the bedpost.

As it was rather dark in the room, the moon having swung round, Sam did not at first notice his chum's predicament.

He saw that he was awake, however, and that was enough for him.

"Say, old man," he said, "what is this ladder doing under your window at this hour? Looks as if thieves had been around. Is your money all right?"

Joe couldn't reply on account of the towel about his mouth, but he tried to attract Sam's attention to his helpless condition.

"What's the matter with you?" continued Sam, rather astonished at the dumbness of his friend. "Haven't you woke up enough to use your tongue?"

Still no answer from Joe—only a succession of odd jerks of the head and body.

"Oh, come now, you know it's me. What are you giving me that dumb show for? What have you got around your face, anyway? A towel?" as he looked more keenly. Got a toothache, eh. That's why you don't open your mouth. Well, you've my sympathy. A toothache is about the worst—hello! what the dickens have you around your arms and chest?"

Sam stepped into the room and walked up to Joe.

"Why, you're bound up and gagged, and you're tied to the bed. My gracious! what's happened?" as he tore the towel from Joe's face. "Has that mysterious Frenchman been here and got away with your money?"

"Yes, yes!" gasped Joe. "He has been here with another man, and they've taken the four boxes with every coin. Did you ever hear of such fierce luck?" added Joe, the tears coming into his eyes. "Robbed by that villain! Help me get free, will you?"

"Sure I will," replied Sam. "Go on and tell me all about it."

And while Sam labored to untie the knots Joe told him the whole story of the visit paid him by Jules Glorieux and his companion, and how they had stolen the four boxes containing the English sovereigns.

Sam had him free before the story was finished, and Joe wound up his mournful tale while hurriedly dressing himself.

"We must wake up John, get a horse put to the wagon and chase those rascals. It's the only thing I can do. I've no doubt they went toward the river. We may find them at Highland waiting for an early train," said Joe, feverishly. "But tell me," he added, almost wonderingly, "how is it you came over here at this early hour? It is just three o'clock."

"I came over here because I got an idea into my head that something was wrong."

"How could you get such an idea as that?" asked Joe, in some astonishment. "Had a bad dream?"

"No. The fact is, I haven't been asleep to-night, and that's the luckiest thing for you that ever happened."

"You haven't been to sleep?" cried Joe.

"Nary a wink."

"Why, how was that?"

"Oh, I was too excited over that five thou. you gave me. I went to bed at nine, but when the clock struck two I was still awake. I got up and looked out of my window, and what do you think I saw?"

"How could I guess what you saw?"

"I saw a horse and wagon coming at a red-hot pace down the road from this direction. There were two men on the seat."

"That must have been the wagon that was carrying off the boxes, and the two Frenchmen."

"That's right, it was," nodded Sam.

"Did you recognize Jules Glorieux?"

"Of Bordeaux?" grinned Sam. "Bet your life I did."

"They were going toward the Hudson, as I thought."

"As hard as they could put."

"They must be there by this time," said Joe, dolefully.

"Perhaps they are; but the boxes of sovereigns aren't with them."

"Why, what do you mean?"

"I mean the wagon met with an accident at the bridge near our place."

"An accident?"

"Exactly. One of the hind wheels came off suddenly, and those boxes of money, every one of them, tumbled over into the creek."

"What!" almost shouted Joe. "Tumbled into the creek?"

"That's what they did, and they're there at this moment. All we've got to do is to go down there and fish them out."

"Sam Parsons, are you telling me the truth, or is this one of your jokes?"

"Nary joke. It's the solemn truth. That's what caused me to come over here. Those boxes having been in the hands of the mysterious Frenchman, who left us yesterday afternoon with a threat on his lips, raised my suspicions, and I came here to see if he and his companion had paid you a night visit for the purpose of getting possession of that money. I was right, and I'm glad I came over."

"If the boxes are in the creek, as you say, we'll get them out somehow, you may depend on that," returned Joe, enthusiastically. "We must look out for those Frenchmen. They are sure to return as soon as they can with ropes and other means to try and recover the boxes. It's up to us to get ahead of them."

"If I was you, I'd send for the constable and have those chaps arrested on the charge of burglary as soon as they showed up at the creek."

"That's just what I mean to do."

"I'll go for him if you want me to," volunteered his chum.

"No. I'm going to wake John up now and send him."

"The four of us ought to be able to capture those monsoos. After we have them safe in the lock-up we can take our time fishing up the boxes."

"We'll need to rig a lift of some kind to raise them out of the bed of the creek."

"We've got a good winch at our place and plenty of rope. All we'll have to do is to rig up a stout pole with a block at the end of it, through which we'll pass a rope. Then we can take turns diving down to attach a sling around the boxes, one at a time."

"You've got it down fine, Sam. That's the way we'll do. Now for John."

Joe left the room to arouse the hired man, leaving Sam to complete in his mind his plans for getting the boxes of money out of the creek.

CHAPTER IX.

CAPTURE OF THE MYSTERIOUS FRENCHMAN AND HIS COMPANION.

At sunrise Joe Page, Sam Parsons, John Jones and Constable Snodgrass were concealed in the shrubbery near the creek bridge waiting for the two Frenchmen to show up.

They had not been there more than fifteen minutes before they heard the sound of wheels come from the direction of Highland.

"I'll bet that's them," said Sam, in some excitement.

The others said nothing, but waited, Jones drawing out the Frenchman's revolver to intimidate the rascals when they came up.

"This is a dandy ambuscade, grinned Sam. "We'll give those chaps the surprise of their lives."

Pretty soon the vehicle hove in sight, and sure enough the two foreigners were on the seat.

Joe, who was peeping down the road, announced the fact.

The wagon drew up nearly opposite to them; then the Frenchmen got out, and the first thing they did was to scramble down the bank of the creek to look into the water for some sign of the boxes.

As the water was clear, they could now see them quite plainly eight feet below the surface.

Returning to the wagon, they busied themselves getting out ropes, with a pole and hoisting tackle which they had brought from their sloop anchored in the Hudson.

They intended to rush things, for they couldn't tell when, as they figured it, Joe would be discovered bound and gagged in bed, and a pursuit started.

While they were thus occupied, the constable and John Jones, followed by the two boys, quietly made their appearance from the shrubbery.

"Throw up your hands," ordered Constable Snodgrass, producing his revolver.

"Sacre!" exclaimed Jules Glorieux, starting back in surprise.

His companion started to draw a revolver, but Jones stepped up and shoved his, at full cock, into his face.

"Surrender, you rascal. I've got the drop on you," thundered the hired man.

"By gar! Dees is von outrage," cried the mysterious Frenchman, glaring at the constable. "I demand dat you give an explanashecon."

"I place you both under arrest," said Constable Snodgrass.

"Comment!" (what!) exclaimed Glorieux. "You arrest us?"

"I do—on the charge of burglary."

"Burglaree! Sare, you make one grand mistake."

"Well, I shall take you before the Squire, and if I have made a mistake he will discharge you from custody," replied the village officer.

"But, sare, I have no desire to go before ze—what you call him—Squire."

"Sorry, monsoo, but I shall have to take you, whether you like it or not. Hold out your hands," and the constable took a pair of handcuffs from his pocket.

Jules Glorieux put up a big kick against the steel wristlets, but he had to give in, for the officer was inexorable.

His companion's hands were bound with a rope.

They were forced to get into the wagon, all hands followed, and John Jones drove the rig into the village, where the Frenchmen were locked up pending their examination before the justice.

"Well, we've got them, all right," grinned Sam. "There's evidence enough against them to send them to the county-seat for trial, so they won't bother us any more."

"We might as well go home for breakfast now," said Joe. "We'll have to walk, for Mr. Snodgrass has taken charge of the Frenchmen's outfit. That tackle in the wagon would be just the thing to haul those boxes up with."

"Then we must persuade Snodgrass to let us have the use of it," said Sam.

"Well, we won't be able to make a move until after Squire Dalton has had these chaps before him, for you and I will be obliged to give our testimony at the examination," replied Joe.

"I guess the boxes won't walk off, and the water won't hurt the gold," said Sam. "It's a good thing you put plenty of iron bands around them, otherwise they'd have broken open and spilled some of their valuable contents."

"They'd have got smashed more or less, anyway, only each landed in a separate spot in the sand," answered Joe. "That saved them."

Joe had a stirring story to tell his mother and sisters when he got home for breakfast, and they were greatly startled.

He had to go into all the particulars about the movements of the mysterious Frenchman from the time he had first seen the light in the stone house.

"Were you not dreadfully frightened when that man held the knife at your throat, Joe?" asked Mildred, with a shudder.

"Well, I didn't feel very good," he replied.

"I am so thankful I came right downstairs without making a fuss because the door was locked," said his mother. "It's a great mercy that he did not kill you, my son."

"I don't think he had any intention of going as far as that, mother; but he's a desperate kind of chap, just the same."

"Would you like to go to the village and be present at the examination?" asked Joe. "Squire Dalton will hold court at ten o'clock."

Mildred was the only one who cared to go; she was curious to look at the mysterious Frenchman and his associate.

News of the arrest of the two desperate Frenchmen who had broken into the Page farmhouse during the night circulated with great rapidity throughout the village of Pembroke, and as a consequence a big crowd of the villagers, both male and female, gathered outside Squire Dalton's office some time before the hour set for the examination of the prisoners.

When John Jones and the two boys appeared they were bombarded with questions, but they declined to say a word on the subject till they went on the stand to give their sworn testimony.

At length the Squire appeared and took his seat, the witnesses were admitted and took chairs provided for them, and then as many of the outsiders crowded into the small room as could find space to stand.

The prisoners were led in by the constable and the proceedings began.

The Frenchmen were charged with housebreaking, and both pleaded not guilty.

Joe was the star witness against them.

He was duly sworn, and then told his story in a cool, straightforward manner.

"What was in these boxes that you accuse the prisoners of stealing?" asked the justice.

"Valuable property belonging to me," replied Joe, not caring to confess the exact nature of their contents as long as the boxes were at the bottom of the creek.

"Were these boxes found in the prisoners' possession?"

"No, sir."

"Then I'm afraid the charge of robbery won't hold unless your statement can be corroborated," said the Squire.

"Sam Parsons is ready to testify that he saw the boxes in possession of these Frenchmen at two o'clock this morning, shortly after the robbery took place."

"Where are the boxes now?"

"At the bottom of Goose Creek, alongside of the bridge."

"How came they to be there?"

"These men were carrying them toward the Hudson in a light wagon, which broke down at the bridge, and the boxes fell out into the creek."

"Constable Snodgrass, if I find that the evidence is sufficient to warrant me in remanding the prisoners, you will see that these boxes are produced at their trial," said Justice Dalton.

Joe looked rather blue at those words.

The custody of the boxes would be taken out of his hands entirely for some little time, and he could not tell what might happen to them during that interval.

The constable would be responsible for them, of course, and Joe knew that he was a thoroughly conscientious man; but if even one of them should be accidentally lost, Mr. Snodgrass would never be able to make its value good.

The boy therefore decided, while Sam was giving his evidence, that he would take the constable into his confidence in respect to the actual nature of the contents of the boxes, and get him to send them to the village bank for safekeeping until it should be necessary to produce them at the trial, when no doubt he would be obliged, anyway, to swear to the value of the boxes.

At the close of the testimony against them the prisoners were asked if they had anything to say, but both declined to make any other defense than a general denial of the charge.

Justice Dalton decided to hold the prisoners for trial, and a commitment was made out.

Constable Snodgrass took them that afternoon to the county seat and turned them over to the warden of the jail.

The constable allowed the boys to take the Frenchmen's rig, just as it stood, for the purpose of recovering the boxes from the creek and bringing them to his house in the village.

After dinner the boys, assisted by John Jones, started in to raise the money boxes.

Inside of an hour they had them out of the creek and in the wagon.

"It's tough," remarked Sam, "that we've got to turn these over to Snodgrass, isn't it? Are you going to tell him they're full of money?"

"I'll have to."

"He'll want to know how you got all that gold."

"We'll give him the whole story about our finding the treasure under the old stone house, pledge him to secrecy, and then get him to deposit the boxes in the village bank. That's the only way out of the difficulty that I can see."

And so that plan was duly and successfully carried out.

CHAPTER X.

JOE'S BUSINESS SCHEME.

"Well," said Sam Parsons, as he and Joe Page sat on the veranda of the Page farmhouse on the following night, "I suppose our trip to New York is indefinitely postponed."

"Oh, I don't know," replied Joe. "You've got a matter of five thousand dollars worth of English gold to change into United States bank bills, and the sooner you do it the sooner you'll feel like an American capitalist."

"That's right," admitted Sam.

"You haven't told your folks about that money?"

"No. I don't feel like giving it up, for that is what I'd have to do if my father knew I had it."

"He'd only take charge of it as your natural guardian to prevent you from making a bad use of it."

"That's right," grinned Sam; "but I'd never see it again, just the same."

"Why not? You'd get it when you reached twenty-one, with the advantage of five years' interest."

"Don't you believe it. That money would go into the family pocketbook and would stay there. I know my old man better than you do."

"Well, what are you going to do with the money when you get it changed into bills?"

"I'm going to put it into a savings bank in Poughkeepsie myself. Then I'll be able to keep a line on it. I'm sick of farming. If I should see a chance to go into some kind of business that would suit me better, I'd have the money to back myself—see?"

"I see; but I'm afraid the possession of so much money would be a temptation for you to embark in schemes that might in the end land you on your uppers."

"Do you take me for a chump?"

"No, I hope not, Sam. I'm only giving you a slight warning. Where did you hide that bag of sovereigns—in your trunk?"

"No. I put it in a niche inside that wide chimney in my room. If the house was to take fire and burn down, the chimney would stand and the money would be as secure as if in a safe."

"Well, that's one of the advantages of those wide, sol-

idly built chimneys of our granddaddies. That house you live in must be one of the old guard."

"It was built over eighty years ago."

"Why don't your father tear it down and put up a new one?"

"He would if he got his fingers on my five thousand dollars."

"He could put up a good house for half that money."

"I suppose when your boxes of sovereigns are released you will make a model farm of your place here. You could easily build a place that would make Squire Dalton's look like thirty cents. That's what I would do if I was in your shoes."

"The first thing I'm going to do with that money, Sam, is to give you another bag of it for what you did for me yesterday morning."

"Another five thousand dollars!" gasped Sam.

"Yes. I might never have recovered those boxes but for you. I want you to understand that I am grateful to you. I certainly would have remained bound and gagged at least three hours longer if you hadn't come over here and released me."

"Ho! I didn't expect any pay for that. We're chums, aren't we? Well, I'd expect you to do the same thing for me if you thought anything was wrong in my direction."

"And I'd do it, Sam," replied Joe, promptly. "Five thousand is little enough by way of a present for saving my money boxes, and so that's what you'll get. You can hand your father over half of it, if you want to, to build a new house."

"I'd do it, if he wouldn't insist on getting the other money."

"Well, Joe, I'll tell you how you can find use for that money in a way that I think would suit you."

"How?"

"By going into a business partnership with me."

"A business partnership with you!" exclaimed Sam, in surprise.

"Yes. I've been talking the matter over with my mother and she approves of the project."

"Does she? Then it must be a good one."

"I think it is. I've had the idea in my mind for nearly a year."

"What is it?"

"The produce commission business in New York."

"Gee! that isn't bad. We both know something about that."

"We only know it from the producer's point of view in a practical sense; but I picked up the whole theory of the commission end from a smart young chap who boarded with us a couple of weeks last summer. As he saw that I was interested in the business, he gave me points to burn, and I haven't forgotten a single one. Now that I shall be able to handle a good bit of money, I'm going into it. Why, with the capital I'll have I'll be able to make the fur fly."

"Any business you were in would suit me to the queen's taste," said Sam, enthusiastically. "I'd like you for a

partner first rate. I wouldn't be afraid of getting skinned out of my cash. Come, now, tell me something about the commission end."

Joe at once explained to him how the business was conducted in New York.

The farmers of New Jersey and certain counties of New York sent their produce consigned to different commission houses located in the wholesale provision district west of Hudson street and below Fourteenth street, New York City.

These selling agents in turn disposed of the consignments to wholesale dealers in lots to suit at the best prices they could get, and rendered statements of the transactions to the farmers.

The men who managed the New York end of the business in the interest of the country producers were supposed to be content with a straight commission for their services.

That was a simple and straightforward method of doing the business.

The young man who had boarded at the Page farmhouse during the early half of the preceding September assured Joe that he knew, from personal experience, that the farmers, who were compelled to trust the commission people, were the victims of a systematic bunco game.

"He told me that the producers got it in the neck all the time," said Joe.

"How do they?" asked Sam, much interested.

"He says the commission men figure up all kinds of charges against the consignments, in addition to their regular commission, and that the balance rendered in favor of their customers looks very dizzy after the head bookkeeper has footed it up."

"Is that a fact?"

"It is, if Dickson—that was the name of our boarder told the truth."

"Why, that's a swindle," cried Sam, indignantly.

"That's what it looks like. I think there is some truth in what he told me, for I have heard a number of farmers up this way complain of the way they had been treated by the commission houses of New York. I know of farmers who let lots of fruit and vegetables go to waste because they said it didn't pay to ship it to the city for sale."

"Gee! that's fierce. But I should think a farmer would shake a commission man after getting one or two hard deals from him and try another."

"He does, naturally, but it doesn't help him any."

"Why not?"

"Because Dickson told me that the chief commission houses are banded together and every one worked along the same lines. The producer is up against the same scale of charges, no matter what house he favors with his stuff, and, in addition, is kept out of his money for an indefinite time."

"No wonder so many farmers cry poverty," said Sam. "I've heard my father squeal about the little profit there is in his fruit when he sends it to market."

"Now, Sam, I propose to start in the commission business on strictly an honest basis. Dickson said there was a good profit on a flat commission of ten per cent. Of course, there are sometimes charges, but these are the exception, not the rule when the country products are shipped in proper shape. If a farmer is careless in this respect he is bounded to be a sufferer, and nobody is then to blame but himself."

"That's right," nodded Sam.

"We'll open an office in the right location, or as near it as we can find a suitable place. Then we'll take turns drumming up the farmers in different sections, assuring them of fair treatment. As soon as business begins to come our way we'll canvass the retail dealers in the city, the larger ones personally and the small fry by circulars. Then, when things get fairly started, we'll try for the hotels—the smaller ones first, and so on up the ladder. In fact, I don't mean to stop at the ordinary produce business. I'm going into the canned industry as well. With my capital I'll be able to handle large consignments of goods—outbid many houses in our line whose capital is either limited or tied up. Cash talks every day in the week. If you've got the money to pay down on the nail the stuff comes your way every time. I shall be able to make contracts with steamship companies and other large interests and do a swell business. In fact, that is what I'm out for. The country produce will be the opening wedge. If through honest dealing and quick returns we can get control of a large part of the farmers' business we'll be able to establish a fine trade, and once we have secured the confidence of the producers we'll be able to hold it against all comers. What do you think of it, Sam?"

"Fine!" cried his chum, enthusiastically. "When are you going to start in?"

"Right away, if you don't mind letting me use your five thousand dollars to set the ball rolling until I can get control of my own funds."

"Let you use it? Well, say, just freeze on to every cent of it. I'm with you in this thing from the ground floor up."

"You'll never regret it, Sam. It will be a start in life for you as well as for myself. But, remember, it will be a case of hustle from the beginning. You can't expect to sit in an office and look for things to come your way. We'll have to get out and work like beavers early and late. One of these days, when we've built up the business, we'll be able to take things easier. But that won't be for a long time."

"I'll hustle, bet your life. Anything is better than everyday farming in New York State. I've had all I want of it, and I guess you know as well as I that there is no future in it."

"Well, it's after nine o'clock, Sam. Time you were going home. Fetch over that bag of sovereigns by eight in the morning. We'll take the 9.10 West Shore train at Highland for Weehawken."

The boys parted for the night, Sam departing with his head full of visions of the future, and feeling as if he had suddenly become a full-grown man.

CHAPTER XI.

PAGE & PARSONS, COMMISSION MERCHANTS.

When the boys reached lower Broadway next morning after eleven o'clock Joe led the way to a well-known trust and safe deposit company, to which he had been recommended by the president of the village bank.

He sent in his letter of introduction to the president and was admitted to that gentleman's private office.

To him Joe told his story of the finding of the twenty thousand pounds of old English sovereigns under the foundation of the old stone house on his mother's property.

He recited the adventures he had had with the mysterious Frenchman, who had come all the way from France, by his own account, with a clue to the buried treasure, but had failed to locate it.

The president was very much interested in his story.

"Now," said Joe, "I have here a sample of the treasure, one of the bags which I gave my chum before I boxed the rest up. It contains one thousand pounds. I want to exchange that for American money. Then, as soon as the authorities release the four boxes after the trial of the two Frenchmen, I want to sell the other nineteen thousand pounds. Now will you undertake to do this for me for a suitable compensation?"

The president said the company would do that for him if the gold was genuine.

"This bag is an exact sample of the others, for my chum and myself have handled every coin when counting it."

The president examined the money closely and was satisfied it was the real thing.

"Wasn't there any papers to give a clue to the original owners of this gold?" asked the gentleman.

"No," answered Joe. "There was not a thing in the chest but the twenty bags, each one carefully tied at the mouth just as this one is."

"And it was found on your mother's property?"

"Yes, sir. I have brought a note to that effect from her," and the boy showed it to the president of the trust company.

The gentleman sent the bag outside to the cashier to count it and compute its exact value in American money.

When this formality had been completed, Joe was paid about forty-eight hundred dollars in bills, and took his departure, promising to call later with the rest of the English money.

After a good lunch the two boys started for the wholesale provision district of the city to look the ground of their proposed business venture well over.

They found a store for rent in the heart of the district, with the office partition standing, and Joe hired it at once for a year, with the privilege of renewal at the same rent.

He then gave an order to a sign painter for a board sign to go over the door.

"Page & Parsons, Commission Merchants, will look fine, you bet your life," said Sam, enthusiastically, as they left the painter's shop.

"It is the first step we are taking on our road to success," replied Joe, as they started across town toward Broadway. "Before we make our next move we might as well register at the Sinclair House, for we shan't leave the city for two or three days."

"That'll suit me all right," replied his companion, with a pleased chuckle.

So they went straight to that hotel and engaged a room.

"Now, Sam," said Joe, as they started uptown along Broadway to take in a few of the sights of the metropolis, "the next thing we'll have to do—and it is a matter requiring considerable judgment, is to secure a competent and trustworthy man to help us launch this business of ours properly. We want a man with practical experience in the produce commission line—a man who can run the city end of the concern while we are out in the country drumming up trade."

"That's right," nodded Sam. "How are you going to get him?"

"I'm going to put an advertisement in one of the big dailies stating just what we want, and then it will be up to us to pick out the right man. We've got to be very careful in making our selection, for a whole lot depends on our choice. We can't rely altogether on references, for nearly every applicant for the position will be prepared to furnish a bunch of apparently gilt-edged ones. We must size our man up from his shoes to his hat, take particular note of his manner in dealing with us, and try to form a correct opinion of his honesty and business ability. You see, a great many sharp persons will be inclined to take advantage of the fact that we are boys and fair game for them. If we make the mistake of employing one of these kind of chaps we'll be apt to suffer for it."

Sam agreed with his chum that the problem was a serious one.

Joe put his advertisement in the Herald, then they walked up Sixth avenue to Central Park and spent an hour there.

They took a Broadway car back to their hotel, had dinner, and afterward went to the theater.

They got a number of answers next morning to their advertisement, one of them from a man who said he had been in the produce commission business several years, but had been forced out of it because, as the boys learned at the interview Joe arranged with him, he had tried to run the business on the very lines the two boys contemplated themselves.

"I did very well at the start," he went on to say, "for the farmers were looking for a square man to do business with; but when the other commission men saw how things were going they combined to drive me out of the district."

I was a thorn in their sides, because I was steadily making inroads on their trade. They sent out representatives to try and cut off my customers; they cut down their commission to the farmers and made all kinds of temporary concessions in order to wipe me out. Finally they resorted to many underhand devices that hurt me greatly. In the end they won out and I had to retire from business."

His name was William Black, and his manner and conversation made a favorable impression on both boys.

Joe had a long talk with him, and was convinced he was in every respect a desirable person to engage.

He promised to give the lads the full benefit of his experience in the business and to take as much interest in its development as though it were his own.

When he found the boys proposed to run matters on the same lines as he had tried to do himself he expressed a strong doubt of their success; but Joe told him they would have capital to burn, and that they intended to burn a good bit of it, if necessary, to force themselves to the front and fight the opposition.

"We're going to win out, too, Mr. Black," said Joe, in a decided tone. "Sam and I are hustlers and fighters from the basement up. We're young, it is true, but the opposition will find themselves badly fooled if they fancy we're going to be easy marks. We will have to depend on your experience to a considerable extent at the outset, and we hope you will do the best you can in our interests."

"I certainly shall," replied Mr. Black.

"At any rate, this will give you the chance to get back at the men who did you up. That ought to be some satisfaction, at any rate. With our capital and energy, backed up with your experience, we propose to make things hum in the produce district. If you prove satisfactory, as we think you will, you'll find that Sam and I will do the right thing by you."

Mr. Black was engaged, and he started at once to get things under way.

He looked after all the necessary details, made suggestions that the young firm adopted without question, and soon proved they had made no mistake in hiring him.

"He's all to the mustard," said Sam, as they were preparing to return to Pembroke to make their final arrangements for an indefinite absence from their homes.

"He's a good, conscientious man, thoroughly up in the business, and will handle all the stuff we can drum up in first-class shape. We couldn't have landed a better man if we'd tried for a month."

"That's right," replied Sam. "We were dead lucky to get him."

The boys spent only a day or two at their homes, and then started out to hustle among the farmers.

It was arranged between them that Sam should work up agreements among the produce and fruit growers of Ulster, Orange and Rockland counties of New York State, while Joe devoted his energies to the farmers of New Jersey.

It was a new experience for the two lads, but they had

pluck, energy and ambition to burn, and both felt confident that they had started upon the road to success.

CHAPTER XII.

THE RESCUE ON THE LAKE.

Before he started to work up the New Jersey trade, Joe crossed the river and took a car down to his place of business, on Fourteenth street, west.

Mr. Black was in the office, reading a newspaper.

He was all ready to attend to business, but there was nothing doing as yet.

But, of course, this state of inaction was not expected to last very long.

He confidently looked to see consignments of produce and fruits arrive in a few days, just as soon as the young proprietors of the business secured a few patrons.

Joe only stopped a short time, just long enough to have a talk with his manager-bookkeeper, and then he started for the Desbrosses street ferry and was soon in Jersey City, where he took a train for the point he intended to begin operations.

Both of the young partners of the firm of Page & Parsons met with success from the very start.

Joe's proposition of a flat ten per cent. commission, with no bogus charges tacked on to reduce the farmer's profits, and a ten-day settlement, captured the producer off-hand, and he readily agreed to sign an agreement to send all his stuff to the new firm.

Most of the farmers that the boys first talked into sending introductory consignments to Page & Parsons were inclined to think this new deal they were promised was too good to be true.

They soon discovered that the house which promised them a "square deal" was keeping its word to the letter, and naturally they were so pleased that they made the fact public, and many producers that the boys had been unable to call on in their neighborhood tried the experiment also of sending their stuff to the new commission house.

The result was that the old commission men began to notice a steady drop off in their business, and, looking around to discover the cause of this, they saw that the firm of Page & Parsons, which had but lately invaded the district, was getting business that by right, they argued, should come to them.

As this state of things got worse instead of better as the boys covered more ground, the opposition people came together to see what could be done to remedy the evil.

The first thing they did was to send agents into the country to head off Joe and Sam, as well as to counteract the success they had already achieved.

The boys were prepared for some such demonstration, and they began to tell the farmers that they might expect to hear from the representatives of their late commission men, and advised them to pay no attention to wily promises of reform on the part of the old houses as long as they were getting their full ninety per cent. returns on a ten-day basis.

The farmers who had already done business with Page & Parsons were satisfied with the treatment they were now receiving, and the agents of the other commission houses found it a difficult job to make any of them return to the old fold.

The fruit season was now commencing, and the very best of the early products found their way to the new house, so that the wholesalers and stewards of the big hotels had to come and see Mr. Black if they wanted any of this stuff, which, as a matter of course, they did.

There was one big and influential fruit grower in New Jersey that Joe tried to reach, but it was some little time before he was able to secure an interview.

On account of his trade the old commission men had been in the habit of treating him pretty decent—each and every one of them that enjoyed the privilege of handling consignments from his great farm and orchards were only too eager to try and retain his good will.

As soon as their early fruit business began to suffer from the encroachments made by Sam and Joe, the commission men who handled Mr. Walton's fruit got together and dispatched one of their brightest agents to fill his head full of distrust for any proposition submitted to him by Page & Parsons.

Unfortunately this man reached his ear before Joe was able to make his acquaintance, and the result was that the bright boy got a cool reception and a flat refusal of business when he did appear with a blank agreement to which he had hoped to secure Walton's signature.

This was Joe's first important setback, and he retired feeling much disappointed.

He recognized that the opposition had got in ahead of him and that their representative had lied about him; but he couldn't do anything, and had to accept his first signal defeat with the best grace possible.

That, however, was not the worst of it. Mr. Walton's neighbors, having great respect for his judgment, followed his lead in the matter of commission houses as in other matters, and Joe found his work cut out for him in that section of New Jersey.

It was a big card for the other houses to be able to control the Walton fruit, for it had a standing among the wholesale trade that put all similar fruit more or less in the shade with the higher class of customers.

Walton fruit fetched the highest prices and sold right off the reel on its arrival in New York.

The opposition therefore scored an important point against Page & Parsons when they cut the new firm out of the Walton business.

Joe was a bit discouraged to find that he could not secure even a single customer in the Walton locality, where the best fruit would come from as the season advanced.

"I hate to give the fight up here," he said to himself, "but I've done the very best I could in this locality and I can't make the least headway."

He was just coming away from the last fruit farm on

his list in that neighborhood, after receiving the usual turn-down.

He started down the road on his bicycle toward the village where he was stopping while he canvassed the district.

He had to pass the Walton farm at the point where a lake of some size bordered the road.

As he drew near this body of water, which was ruffled by a stiff afternoon wind, he noticed a pretty little sailboat, in which was a lovely miss of perhaps fifteen and a well-dressed boy a year older.

The boy was steering the boat, and from the actions of the small craft it struck Joe, who knew something about boat sailing, that the lad was a novice in the art of handling a sailboat.

He kept his eye on the craft as he rode along.

"That chap knows as much about sailing a boat as a donkey does about dancing. Even if he did know something, it was rash in him to put out on the lake in this wind, especially with that girl for a passenger. I shouldn't be at all surprised to see him capsize any moment."

The words were scarcely out of his mouth before a sudden flaw struck the sail.

Not being a skillful boatman, the boy was wholly unprepared for it, and the boat upset.

Struggling in terror and confusion, the lad struck out for the nearest shore, leaving the screaming girl to her fate.

She could not swim, and the suddenness of the catastrophe had unnerved her.

With a cry of dismay Joe sprang from his wheel and rushed down to the shore of the lake.

By this time the girl had sunk out of view, her natty straw hat alone floating upon the surface of the troubled water.

"By George!" breathed Joe, "I must save her if I can, but I'm afraid it's a case of touch and go."

He was an excellent swimmer, fortunately.

He kicked off his shoes, cast aside his jacket, and sprang into the lake.

With strong, sturdy strokes, hand-over-hand fashion, he worked his way out to the drowning girl.

"She's come up," he said. "If I can only reach her before she goes down again."

The distance he had to cover was too far, however, and her struggling form went under for the second time before he got within a dozen yards of her.

In the meantime the boy had reached shore and was running frantically toward a fine-looking mansion not far away to get help.

This mansion was the residence of Mr. Walton, and, as it happened, the girl who was now in such desperate peril was his only daughter, the pet of the household.

Joe put on an extra spurt and reached the spot where Jessie Walton had gone down for the second time just as she reappeared in a semi-unconscious state on the surface.

He grabbed her at once and skillfully lifted her head

above the water-line, while he swam out with one hand for the keel of the overturned boat.

He reached it after a great effort, and, getting a good hold on it, held the pallid and motionless girl as far out of the water as he could, while he rested himself.

As the moments passed he found his situation growing more and more uncomfortable, for he could only use one arm to hang on, while the other was employed in supporting the girl, who was gradually regaining her senses.

This brought a heavy and awkward strain on his left arm, and he was afraid he would soon have to let go and swim with his burden for the shore.

At this point, however, Mr. Walton and his gardener came toward the lake at a run, the father nearly frantic with anxiety at the thought that his beloved child might now be lying stark and dead at the bottom.

The gardener's sharp eyes made out Joe clinging to the bottom of the sailboat with Jessie in his arm, and he called Mr. Walton's attention to the fact.

There was a rowboat tied to the shore a short distance away, and to this both men repaired as fast as they could get there.

They pushed off and the gardener pulled at the oars with all his energy.

The overturned craft with its living freight was being blown further and further away from the shore, a fact that Joe soon woke up to.

"I'm afraid it's too long a distance to swim with this girl," he said to himself. "I'll have to try and manage to get astride of the keel and haul her up alongside of it. Somebody will be sure to come out after us before long."

He was about to put this scheme into practice when he heard the sound of oars, and looking back across the water saw the approaching boat.

CHAPTER XIII.

JOE CAPTURES A BIG CONTRACT.

Shouting words of encouragement to Joe, and urging his gardener to his best efforts with the oars, Mr. Walton stood up in the boat with his anxious eyes fastened upon his slowly reviving daughter.

At last, after what seemed an age to the distressed father, the boat shot within reach of the capsized sailboat, and Mr. Walton bent down and grasped his child under the arms.

"Thank Heaven!" he breathed, as he drew her into the rowboat, "you are safe, my Jessie."

"She murmured, "Father," and feebly tried to throw her arms around his neck.

In the meantime the gardener assisted Joe into the boat and then pulled out for the shore.

Mr. Walton thought of nothing but his daughter until they were within reach of the solid ground, when she was so far recovered as to be able to walk ashore on his arm.

"Young man," said the big fruit grower, "I am under the deepest of obligations to you for going to the assistance of my daughter when that sailboat upset. I feel sure that

but for your promptness and courage my child would probably have been drowned. You must come to my home at once, for you are drenched, and your clothes will have to be dried. Besides, I could not think of letting you depart in an off-hand way after what you have done for us."

"Very well, sir," replied Joe. "It will, of course, be necessary for me to have my clothes dried, as this is the only suit I have with me. I will get my coat and shoes and my bicycle, which are only a short distance away, and follow you to the house."

"No, no," replied Mr. Walton; "my gardener will get your things. William, go for this young man's wheel and other articles."

"I hope you are feeling better, Miss Walton," said Joe to the pretty but water-soaked miss, as the three walked up toward the mansion.

"Yes, thank you," with a blush and a smile, as she stole a shy glance into the face of the boy to whom she knew she owed her life. "I am very grateful to you," she added in a low voice.

"Don't mention it, Miss Walton. I am very happy I was able to reach you in time to prevent you from sinking the third time."

"Great heaven!" exclaimed Mr. Walton, "was she so near death as that?"

"I'm afraid she was, sir. I was fully twenty feet away from her when she sank the second time. I barely got to her as she rose once more to the surface. However, as long as she is safe it doesn't matter how close she came to drowning," said the boy, with a light laugh. "A miss, you know, is as good as a mile."

"My young friend, if you could realize how very dear my motherless child is to me you would understand how words fail to express the gratitude I feel toward you for saving her precious life, and I shall not allow you to leave my place until I have testified my appreciation in some fitting manner."

"I hope you are not thinking of offering me any reward, sir," said Joe, hastily, "for if you are I must decline to receive it."

"No, my lad, I am not thinking of doing that. It would be utterly out of my power to pay you for a service that is beyond price. But I shall insist that you accept some little token as evidence of my esteem and friendship for you."

"You have already thanked me in a way that shows your gratitude, and I think that covers the matter," replied Joe. "I don't see that I have done more than my duty under the circumstances. As long as I am a good swimmer, it was up to me to do the best I could for the young lady. I am sure anybody equal to the emergency would have done just as I did."

They had now reached the house, and Mr. Walton turned his daughter over to the anxious-looking housekeeper, who hurried the girl to her room.

The grateful father led Joe upstairs to a chamber and told the boy to undress.

He brought him a suit of his own underclothes and a pair of trousers.

"Put these on for the present," he said. "I will have your own clothes dried and pressed; but of course it will take a little while. You must consider yourself my guest for the day, at least."

After he had carried Joe's wet things downstairs to the laundry-room, where a servant was instructed to attend to them, Mr. Walton returned to the boy and took him to his library.

"I think we have met before, have we not?" asked the fruit grower.

"Yes, sir," replied the young commission merchant. "I called on you two days ago to secure your fruit trade, but," with a smile, "I had very poor luck. I could not induce you to even consider my proposition."

"Ah, yes, I remember. Your name is——"

"Page, Joe Page, of the produce commission firm of Page & Parsons, No. — West Fourteenth street, New York. My partner and I have only been in business a short time, but long enough to let the trade know that we're alive and hustling for our share of the fruit and produce that comes to the metropolis."

Mr. Walton smiled good-naturedly.

He now regarded Joe in an altogether different light than previously when the boy had addressed himself to him in the guise of a canvasser for his trade.

"I am afraid I treated you rather churlishly at our last interview," said the fruit grower. "If you will permit me I shall be glad now to make amends for it."

"Well, sir," said the bright boy, taking advantage of the circumstances, with an eye to business, "I shall be happy to repeat my proposition if you care to hear me."

"I will listen to you with pleasure."

Joe at once launched into the object which had brought him into that part of New Jersey, and he talked earnestly and right to the point.

Mr. Walton listened attentively, and when his guest had finished he told him the reasons for his refusal to negotiate with the new firm.

He had been dealing with his present commission people for years and had no fault to find with them.

Besides, one of their representatives had lately called on him and made statements regarding Page & Parsons that did not appear to be to their credit.

"Those statements were all lies," replied Joe, a bit hotly. "We are stepping on the toes of the old commission men, and they have evidently combined to freeze us out. But it won't do them any good in the long run to run us down. We have the capital at our back and have come to stay. If they go too far I am going to make things so hot for them that they'll be glad to haul in their horns. They ran one man out by crooked methods because he cut into their trade. That man is now our bookkeeper and manager. If they try the same game—as I expect they will—on us, there's going to be something doing they won't like. I'll put every man in jail that I can reach on a criminal

charge. We may be boys, but we're out for our rights, and we're going to get them, in spite of every produce commission man in New York."

Joe looked right all over, and Mr. Walton rather admired his pluck.

"Well, my young friend," he said, "you have won my lifelong gratitude, and I am going to take advantage of this opportunity to repay you in part for your invaluable services this day. I will sign an agreement with you to send you all my consignments hereafter, and take the risk of you doing as well by me as the other commission people."

"You'll take no risk whatever, sir," replied Joe, promptly. "If we can't show as good results as the others, I'll tear up your contract and release you from any further obligation to patronize us."

"Well, that is certainly very fair on your part," smiled the fruit grower. "Now, have you done any business with my neighbors?"

"No, sir. I haven't caught one. They all seem to follow your lead, and what is good enough for you seems to suit them. I hope to have better luck with them when I take your agreement around with me and show them."

"I think there is a better way than that."

"What is it, sir?"

"If you will remain all night with us here, I'll take you around in my auto to-morrow morning and personally urge my neighbors to sign agreements with you. I think I will be able to secure you the entire output of the district."

"I shall be glad to accept your generous invitation, Mr. Walton," replied Joe, overjoyed at the brilliant prospect. "It will be the biggest kind of victory for the firm of Page & Parsons."

"Your partner is not as young as you are, is he?" asked the fruit grower.

"Yes, sir. There is not more than two months' difference in our ages."

"Well, I must say you are a pair of enterprising young fellows and deserve all the encouragement you can receive. You have interested me greatly, and, apart from the obligation I feel under to you, I shall be glad to give your business a boost. My fruit is the most sought after in New York, and consequently commands top-notch prices. It will be something of a card for you to handle it, for it will compel the wholesalers to patronize you, and will bring your firm prominently before the trade."

"That's right, sir. I had that in view when I came out here to make a try for you, though every one I spoke to told me I hadn't a ghost of a show to catch you."

"Then everybody will find they miscalculated your persuasive powers," laughed Mr. Walton.

"I'm afraid it is more luck than anything else, sir. If I hadn't been so fortunate as to be on hand to rescue your daughter I am satisfied I would have taken the train to-day back to New York empty-handed."

Joe's clothes were dried and pressed in time for him to go to dinner looking as he usually did.

He was then formally introduced to Jessie Walton by

her father, and he was quite impressed by the girl's good looks and vivaciousness.

She had not suffered in any way from her involuntary bath, and he voted her the most charming young lady he had ever met.

CHAPTER XIV.

PAGE & PARSONS ON THE ROAD TO SUCCESS.

Joe found Jessie Walton very entertaining both at dinner and in the parlor afterward.

She played quite brilliantly on the piano, and sang with bewitching effect one of the latest musical novelties.

Then she sat alongside of him on a lounge and talked about the fine fruit farm her father owned, how he must go over it in the morning, and how very glad she was that he was in the commission business and able to handle the Walton brand, which she had no hesitation in declaring the best on the market, as it undoubtedly was.

"Your father's trade will give me a big boost," said Joe. "I ought to thank you for putting me in the way of securing it."

"Thank me!" she exclaimed, opening her eyes with surprise. "Why, I had nothing to do with it. I didn't even know you were in the commission business until father told me he had signed an agreement to send you all of his fruit."

"But if you hadn't fallen into the water, and given me the opportunity to pull you out, I should never have got the contract," he said, smilingly.

"Oh!" she exclaimed archly. "Then I didn't get a ducking in vain, did I?"

"It was a mighty risky ducking, Miss Jessie, and I wouldn't advise you to repeat it."

"I won't go out again in that boat on the lake," she said, with a positive nod of her head; "at least, not with Archie Davis. He told me he could sail the boat all right."

"I am afraid he has an exaggerated opinion of his abilities in that direction," replied Joe. "I was watching the boat for some minutes before she upset, and I am bound to say he doesn't know the first thing about it. It was very foolish for him to try such a dangerous experiment on so windy an afternoon."

"Well, I just dote on the water; that's why I allowed him to persuade me to go out. He insisted that it wasn't blowing too hard. I shall give him a piece of my mind when I see him. He ought to have been ashamed to leave me to drown, when he can swim. He might have helped me get as far as the overturned boat. Then we both could have held on till some one saw our predicament. If it hadn't been for you"—and she looked gratefully into Joe's face—

"I am sure I would never have come ashore alive."

"Well, you did get ashore alive, so we'll let the matter go at that."

"And you believe I am truly grateful to you, don't you?"

"Sure, I do."

"I am so glad my father was able to put something in

your way. You may be sure you have his custom for good as long as you are in the commission business."

"I am glad to hear that, of course; but we expect to deserve it by handling it right up to the mark. If we couldn't do that we would have no right to expect to hold it, for business is business, and your father would suffer in pocket and reputation if his fruit was not properly marketed."

"Father hasn't any fears of that. He told me you were the smartest boy he ever talked to."

"I am much obliged to your father for his good opinion. I hope to deserve it."

"I think you deserve it," she replied, demurely.

"You are very kind to say so, Miss Jessie. I also hope to hold your friendship indefinitely, too."

"There's no fear of that, either. I shall never forget what you did for me as long as I live."

Mr. Walton now came into the parlor and the conversation became general.

Next morning after breakfast Joe was shown over the big fruit farm, and he was willing to believe that it was the finest in the State of New Jersey.

Mr. Walton then took him around to his neighbors in his automobile, and Joe soon had half a dozen signed agreements in his possession.

They returned to the mansion in time for lunch, after which Joe said he must return to New York to make arrangements for the reception of the big consignments that would be coming his way in a day or two.

He found Sam at the office when he got back.

"You didn't do so bad in Jersey, Joe," said his partner, with a grin.

"You don't know yet how well I did," replied Joe.

"I know there's a lot of produce coming in every day from that State, and it wouldn't have come to us unless you had been handing the farmers out a pretty stiff game of talk."

"I did the best I know how in that direction. I find I'm not a bad talker when I get down to business. You didn't do so bad yourself up-State."

"I had to talk some of the people deaf, dumb and blind before I could make any impression on them. Some folks are awfully thick," remarked Sam.

"Well, as long as you got them in the end, it didn't matter how much trouble you had. They'll stick all the closer to us for it."

"I hope they will. Well, how about the Sunbury section? Mr. Black said you made a break for the Walton Fruit Farm and neighboring places. How did you make out?"

"What chance did Mr. Black seem to think I had?" asked Joe.

"Very slim. Jackson & Cornish, Bailey & Co. and Cooke & Denning have a mortgage on the whole of that district."

"Who said they have?"

"Why, Mr. Black, of course."

"I won't deny that he had good reason for his opinion. It was the hardest proposition I've been up against. Yes—

terday noon, after having talked to every grower in that section, I was ready to throw up my hands in disgust. The other commission houses got a man down there before me, and what he didn't say to queer us isn't worth mentioning."

"Is that a fact?" asked Sam, indignantly.

"Yes, that's a fact. I had it from Mr. Walton's own lips."

"Then your trip was a failure?" said Sam, glumly.

"No, it wasn't. Something happened that changed the whole complexion of matters."

"What happened?" asked Sam, with a look of interest.

"Well, a very pretty girl tumbled into the lake adjoining the Walton Farm just as I was passing by on my wheel. I jumped into the water and saved her life."

"The deuce you did!"

"I did for a fact."

"Gee! you are quite a hero," with a chuckle. "A pretty girl, too. I wouldn't mind saving the life of a pretty girl myself. Is it a case of spoons?"

"Nonsense!"

"Well, what did that have to do with your business?"

"A great deal."

"Oh, come, now, don't keep a fellow on the rack. How did the fact that you saved the girl help your business?"

"She happened to be the daughter of Mr. Walton."

"You don't say!" whistled Sam.

"Mr. Walton had turned our proposition down hard two days before. He would hardly listen to me. After I saved his daughter he couldn't do enough for me."

"I should think not."

"Well, he signed an agreement to send every crate of fruit and produce he ships hereafter direct to us."

"That's fine. He's a big shipper."

"And that wasn't all he did for me."

"What else did he do?"

"Took me around in his auto to all the neighboring farms and talked the proprietors into signing similar agreements."

"You don't mean it!" gasped Sam.

"I wouldn't say it if I didn't mean it."

"Holy smoke! There'll be war in the provision district over this. Why, Jackson & Cornish, Bailey & Co., and Cooke & Denning will be wild. It won't be healthy for us to walk by their stores."

"Don't you worry about them. They tried to do us a mean trick in that district, and I'm glad they have got it in the neck. Some other firms I might mention will get it in the neck, too, if they aren't careful."

"I'll call Mr. Black in and you can tell him the good news," said Sam.

Mr. Black could hardly believe his ears when Joe told him that hereafter they had a steady customer in the Walton Fruit Farm, and also that the six other Sunbury farmers had signed regular season agreements.

"Young gentlemen," said their manager, "you have made the greatest coup in the history of the commission business. Page & Parsons is bound to go right to the front."

"You bet," said Sam, emphatically. "And we're going to stay at the front, too."

CHAPTER XV.

PAGE & PARSONS BREAK INTO THE CANNED GOODS TRADE.

If an earthquake shock had struck the wholesale provision district south of Fourteenth street it couldn't have created greater consternation among the produce commission houses than when the fact became generally known to the trade that Page & Parsons, the new firm of commission merchants, had actually captured not only the Walton Fruit Farm, but every other fruit grower in the Sunbury district.

What Jackson & Cornish had to say on the subject would hardly bear repetition in print.

Bailey & Co. and Cooke & Denning were also heard to use language that was more forcible than polite.

Then the trade made another discovery—that Page & Parsons were only boys not yet seventeen.

Before they found that fact out they had imagined that their old rival, William Black, who had been observed in charge of the new concern, was masquerading under a new name.

How two boys could start in the commission business and skirmish up such a good trade inside of a month was a marvel to the men who had been in the trade for years.

It was gall and wormwood to the regular houses to see the wholesalers rushing into Page & Parsons' in order to fill their orders for stuff that the old-timers could not supply.

The clique of commission men realized that they were going to lose a whole lot of money during the coming season, now almost upon them, if something wasn't done to choke off Page & Parsons.

So a conference was called to discuss the subject, and ways and means were proposed looking to the doing-up of the boy firm.

The young firm was now handling a remarkable amount of business, considering the short time Joe and Sam were in the trade.

After this Joe Page remained at the office, while Sam took short trips throughout New Jersey drumming up additional customers.

Mr. Black had proved to be invaluable to them, and the firm raised his salary half as much again as had been originally agreed upon between them.

Joe hadn't made any mistake in his early statement that they intended to make things hum in the wholesale produce district.

The only trouble was they had made a host of enemies of their business rivals, and whenever the boys passed the offices of the other commission men they were treated to black looks, and muttered threats followed their footsteps.

But neither Sam nor Joe cared a snap for that; they were on the road to success, and that was satisfaction enough for them.

It was about this time that the boys received a note from

Constable Snodgrass, of Pembroke, notifying them that their presence would be required at the trial of Jules Glo-rioux and his companion, Gaston, which was to take place two days later at Dexter, the county seat.

So Joe telegraphed his mother to send John, the hired man, with a rig to meet Sam and himself at Highland on the arrival of a certain train over the West Shore Railroad.

Everybody in Pembroke knew that Joe Page and Sam Parsons had gone into the produce commission business in New York City, and had heard they were doing well.

Therefore when the boys appeared in the village, in company with John, on their way to Dexter, the day after their return home, they were objects of much interest.

The trial of the Frenchmen did not take long.

They were defended by a town lawyer, but the evidence against them was sufficient to secure their conviction, and they were sentenced to five years in the Auburn Penitentiary.

Joe then secured an order from the judge for the return to him of the four boxes of English sovereigns which had formed a sensational feature of the trial.

Joe's confession on the witness stand of the character of the contents of the boxes, as well as his story, corroborated by Sam and John, of the finding of the treasure chest under the foundation of the old stone house on his mother's property, aroused a good deal of excitement in court.

The news reached Pembroke ahead of them, and the villagers almost mobbed the boys in an effort to find out additional particulars about the remarkable discovery.

For days after that the village was agog over the event, and it seemed as if half of the residents visited the old stone house to look at the hole, which still remained uncovered, where so large an amount of English gold had remained for so long a time hidden and unthought of.

Everybody who had the slightest acquaintance with Mrs. Page and her daughters, as well as many who did not know them at all, visited the Page home to congratulate them on their accession to wealth, and to try to find out what their plans were for the future.

Joe and Sam hurried the English money to New York, where they turned it over to the trust company, and the former received a check for something over ninety-one thousand dollars.

Sam received the additional five thousand dollars his chum had promised him for his services the night the boxes were stolen from the Page home, and he immediately turned it into the business.

Joe put in ten thousand dollars himself, which put the boys on an equal footing, with a capital of twenty thousand dollars.

Joe now turned his attention to the handling of canned goods and laid in a big stock of Western goods.

The firm then notified the wholesalers who supplied the numerous summer hotels, just opening up for the season, that it was in a position to supply them with canned goods at the lowest market figures and without delay.

In fact, Page & Parsons proclaimed the fact broadcast that they made a specialty of rush orders, and this announcement brought a flood of orders for canned goods to the young firm when the first hot wave caused the hotel proprietors to clamor for instant delivery of extra supplies, which the wholesalers were unable to obtain in time from the commission people they were accustomed to patronize.

"I tell you, Joe, we're doing a bang-up trade now, aren't we?" said Sam one morning, as he watched his partner going through the early mail.

"I don't know as we have any cause to complain," replied Joe, "but I hope to see it grow still better. In fact, I have already got my hooks out for some big contracts to supply canned goods. There's no reason why we shouldn't work up a very large business, for I have fifty thousand dollars in bank to loan the firm at any moment."

"Well, we can't do too much business to suit me," answered Sam. "The more the merrier. We've got several of the old produce houses skinned to death already. That private detective we employed kind of discouraged the crooked work our rivals expected to practice to put us out of business. I guess they are satisfied now that we are too smart for them."

"I hear some of them have adopted our square method of doing business in an effort to coax some of their old customers back."

"I'm not surprised to hear that," replied Sam. "We turned the tide pretty strong against the old method."

"Want to see the plans for our new home up country, Sam," said Joe, taking down a roll of blue print that lay on the top of his desk.

"We're going to build it on the 35-acre plot."

"Sure I do," replied his chum, eagerly.

"The one where the old stone house is, eh?"

"Yes. Mother is going to have a fine lawn all around the house. It will be one of the swellest residences in the county."

"Well, you've got the stuff to make it so."

"Mother is going to put it up herself with a part of the \$20,000 I gave her."

"How much did you give your sisters?"

"Two thousand a-piece. That leaves me \$50,000 in bank to meet any call for spot cash in our business. Some of these big contracts I am angling for now will require a large temporary outlay at first if I succeed in landing them. That's the advantage of having money at one's back. Lots of businesses to-day are being run at a disadvantage on account of the lack of capital or credit."

At that moment Mr. Black opened the glass door.

"There is a young lady in the store wishes to see you, Mr. Page," he said.

"Wishes to see me, eh?" said Joe, jumping up from his desk and wondering who it could be. "I'll be back in a minute, Sam."

When he walked into the store he saw a handsomely dressed girl standing near the door.

As he approached her she turned around and Joe, to his surprise, recognized Jessie Walton.

"Why, Miss Walton!" he exclaimed, "this is an unexpected pleasure."

"Am I welcome?" she asked, laughingly.

"As welcome as the flowers in May and the roses in June," he exclaimed. "Come right into the office and I'll introduce you to my partner. He's been crazy to see the young lady I pulled out of the water."

Joe led the way inside.

"Miss Walton, this is my chum and partner, Sam Parsons. Sam, this is Mr. Walton's daughter."

Sam bowed and motioned Jessie to take the chair beside the desk he had just vacated.

Jessie stayed half an hour and then declared she must take the Desbrosses Street ferry in order to catch a certain train for Sunbury.

"She's a peach for fair," remarked Sam after she had taken her departure. "I would like to have the inside track with such a girl. I guess you're pretty solid with her. At any rate, you ought to be, after saving her life."

"Oh, I dare say, she likes me well enough," replied Joe, in an off-hand way.

"And how do you like her?" grinned his partner.

"Come now, Sam, you want to know too much," replied Joe, flushing up.

Sam chuckled gleefully, for he saw he had touched on a tender spot.

CHAPTER XVI.

CONCLUSION.

As the summer advanced, Page & Parsons had all they could do to handle the fruit and produce that came their way.

On a conservative estimate about half of the New Jersey product that came to the city was consigned to them.

Under such circumstances it goes without saying that the two boys were coining all kinds of money.

Joe had an inborn knack of doing business just right.

With his ambition, tact, energy and capital, there seemed to be no limit to the success the firm might in the course of time attain.

"Say, Joe," said Sam, bursting into the office one morning at the end of the summer, "it looks like a sure thing that the United States is going to interfere in this Cuban mix-up. The paper is full of it this morning. Now, if the Government sends troops to the island there'll be a sudden call for canned meats and vegetables. How do we stand to fill a rush order in that direction if some contractor should happen to interview us on the subject?"

"Well, Sam," replied his partner, "we can deliver \$100,000 worth of such stuff inside of twenty-four hours, and \$50,000 worth more right on top of that."

"Whew!" whistled Sam. "Do you mean to say you have bought that much stock? You couldn't have paid for it."

"I've bought it after a fashion. That is, I've ordered

\$100,000 worth of the goods to be held for a certain time subject to our order. This cost us \$5,000. I've also spoken for the \$50,000 worth provisionally."

"How did you come to do that?"

"Soon after the first suggestion appeared in the papers that President Roosevelt might consider it necessary to shake the 'big stick' over our sister Republic I found out that a certain contractor had received a tip from a big official that bids for commissary stores would soon be called for. On the strength of that I negotiated for the stuff I have mentioned and then put in an offer to the said contractor to supply him with \$100,000 worth of goods at a figure that would give us a fair margin of profit. I received a non-committal reply from him, but I concluded to risk \$5,000 on the chance of getting the order. The goods are ready to be shipped from the Middle West on a telegraphic notice, and arrangements can be made to send them on by fast freight if necessary. If the Government should make a quick demand for supplies I think we can meet the emergency in shorter time than any one else in our line."

"Joe, you've got a long head, upon my word, you have," said Sam, admiringly.

"The times are so swift, Sam, a fellow has got to see some distance ahead or he isn't in the running."

"That isn't any lie. By the way, I see you've got your grip here this morning. Where are you going over Sunday? Home?"

"No. Got an invitation out to Sunbury."

"That's the third," snickered Sam. "Things are rushing in that direction."

"What do you mean by that?" said Joe, with a rather red face.

"Nothing much. Miss Walton seems to be a strong attraction, that's all."

"Oh, you get out. This invitation is from Mr. Walton."

"Sure it is," laughed Sam. "Miss Walton hasn't the least idea you're coming. No, of course not. Won't be at the station to meet you in her pony phaeton, like she did on the other occasions. Ho, ho, Joe, you can't fool your old pard," and Sam walked chuckling out of the office.

Joe took an early afternoon train for Sunbury and found Jessie Walton waiting for him at the station with her dogcart.

She drove him to her home herself, as she was quite a whip in her way.

He enjoyed himself immensely during his short stay, and was decidedly sorry when Monday morning came and he had to leave for New York.

"What do you think, Joe?" said Sam, coming into the private office that afternoon; "Jackson & Cornish have gone into the canned goods business."

"Who told you they had? It's the first I've heard of it."

"Johnson, bookkeeper for Tibbetts & Co. He and I are kind of friendly. He told me Jackson had nailed a big contract this morning, but he couldn't tell me any of the particulars."

"Where did Johnson get his information from? Do you think it's reliable?"

"He got a hint from one of Jackson's employees."

"Well, I suppose we shall find them trying to cut into our trade. They're pretty sore over the way Mr. Walton shook them for us. If they could turn the trick on us once and awhile it would make them feel good."

Half an hour later Joe was walking down the street and he almost ran into Jackson.

That gentleman favored him with a half sarcastic, half triumphant smile.

"Did you get that Government order you're after yet?" he asked sneeringly.

Then he passed on, leaving Joe in a state of great astonishment, for this was the first time Jackson had ever addressed him.

"There's something in the wind," mused the young commission merchant. "How did he know I was after the Government contract? There's been a leak somewhere, and I'd give something to know what he meant by that remark."

Next morning the papers had the news that certain troops of the Department of the East had been ordered to hold themselves in readiness for a sudden departure for Cuba.

That meant, if true, that supplies would be needed at once, so Joe called up the contractor to whom he had submitted a bid and asked for information.

The reply came back that a contract had been made already with Jackson & Cornish to furnish all that would be required.

This was a severe disappointment to the boy.

"Well, Sam, Jackson & Cornish have managed to get back at us at last," he said when his partner came into the office later on.

"They have?" cried Sam, in some astonishment. "How is that?"

Joe gave him the particulars and his chum was disgusted.

"That's fierce. Shall we lose that \$5,000?"

"It looks like it just now. But don't worry, we can stand it. I took chances on a long shot, and a screw worked loose somehow. That's the whole story."

About two o'clock a newsboy brought an afternoon paper into the office.

Joe picked it up and the first thing he noticed in big type was a railroad accident on the Lake Shore Railroad.

A fast freight had been derailed east of Cleveland, and about twenty cars had gone down an embankment and been smashed into kindling wood.

The accident had been caused by a defective switch.

The story had no particular significance for Joe, and he soon tossed the paper aside.

It was getting on to five o'clock when a man he had never seen before was admitted to his room.

"You have the reputation for being able to fill rush orders for canned goods, Mr. Page," said his visitor, com-

ing directly to the point. "Now, can you deliver in Jersey City a pretty big order—say \$100,000 worth of prime preserved meats and vegetables—in twenty hours? If so, let me have your price."

"Who do you represent, Mr. Pratt?" asked Joe, curiously.

"That isn't material," replied his caller. "I want your spot cash figure. Money talks, doesn't it?"

"It usually does," replied Joe, who then quoted the man a price which his visitor accepted conditional on the delivery of the goods within twenty four hours at the outside, but twenty if possible.

"Here is a certified check for \$10,000 on account," said the man, "as a guarantee the goods will be taken on arrival within the specified time. Send your representative with the documents to my office to-morrow the moment you receive word the cars are in the freight yard, and the balance will be paid in bills."

The man took his departure, after laying his card on Joe's desk, and then the young commission merchant rang up the Dundee concern on the long distance wire, and completed his purchase of the \$100,000 order, conditional on arrival of the goods at Jersey City within 22 hours.

Next morning Joe learned that the canned goods Jackson & Cornish had ordered from Chicago to fill their Government contract had gone to smash in the Lake Shore freight wreck, and then he smelt a mouse.

Jackson & Cornish in a roundabout way had placed the same order with him to fill, sacrificing their profit in order to be able to fill their contract.

The goods arrived in time and Page & Parsons got their money for them, and then the two young partners had a quiet laugh at the expense of their rivals.

As this event happened only the other day, we must close our story at this point, leaving Joe Page and his friend, Sam Parsons, in full swing on their road to success, two of the smartest boys in the city of New York.

We need only mention one more fact which Joe confided to the author the other day, and that is Jessie Walton had, with her father's consent, promised to marry him when she reaches her eighteenth birthday.

With those words we close the career of a fortunate boy.

(THE END.)

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